

Journal article

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# Volunteering for all? Explaining patterns of volunteering, identifying strategies to promote it

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## ***Abstract***

In policy terms in the UK, as elsewhere, volunteering has become increasingly associated with training for the workplace; a view which offers little to individuals 'beyond' the labour market because of age, disability or care commitments. Applying a neo-Durkheimian framework to a study of volunteers we examine how far the patterns of volunteering can be explained by the underlying institutional factors of strong and weak social regulation and social integration. This framework can offer insights into a range of possible policy levers for individuals rather than a 'one size fits all' emphasis on volunteering for personal gain for the workplace.

## **Key words**

Volunteering, gender, motivation, neo-Durkheimian institutional theory.

In a number of countries the voluntary sector has been mainstreamed into public policy with consequences that include more reliance upon the time, commitment and skills of volunteers (Zappala, 2000; Kendall, 2000; Blackmore, 2005). In an attempt to broaden the volunteer base in England a new cross government programme *Volunteering For All* was announced in March 2006 to promote opportunities to potential volunteers, especially adults at risk of social exclusion (Home Office, 2006). In this article we focus on individuals and voluntary work in the UK, where in policy terms volunteering has become increasingly associated with training and retraining for the workplace (Russell, 2005). This instrumental view does not apply to individuals ‘beyond’ the labour market because of age, disability or care commitments. Policy statements highlight the rewards that can be enjoyed by volunteers themselves as much as or more than the contribution that they can make to the wellbeing of others.

In the UK some recent research has used qualitative methods to examine the context, experience and consequences of volunteering as well as reasons for entering it (Devine, 2003). Devine identified a need for further research to explore the issue of time and voluntary action, specifically how volunteers juggle voluntary action along with other commitments (Devine, 2003). To this end in our article we seek to understand more about the qualitative experience of volunteering, especially to develop theory of the variety in the fundamental variation in motivation for and meanings attached to volunteering, and how people negotiate the constraints and opportunities in their daily lives, and manage to create (emotional, temporal and physical) space for volunteering (i.e., for formal voluntary organisations).

As a framework for understanding socially shaped explanations about why people volunteer, we draw on a neo-Durkheimian institutional theoretical tradition (cf. Douglas and Ney,

1998). The theory lends itself more readily to empirical examination using in-depth qualitative methods than quantitative surveys (Tansey, 2004). To explore this framework, we analyse data from an empirical study of individual volunteers working in an English East Midlands community, which we call Brightville, where many people experience social deprivation and unemployment. First, we examine how far the patterns of volunteering observed in Brightville can be explained by the underlying institutional factors of strong and weak social regulation and social integration. We use a series of qualitative case studies to examine this relationship. Secondly, we show that the framework can offer insights into a range of possible policy levers for individuals rather than a ‘one size fits all’ emphasis on volunteering for personal gain for the workplace.

After this introduction, the article is divided into five sections. Section two explores the third sector, volunteering and communities. Section three highlights the neo-Durkheimian framework for understanding individual motivation to volunteer within different social contexts. The penultimate section presents the methods employed and empirical evidence from case study research, and the final section provides a conclusion which draws out the implications of the theory for the design of interventions to cultivate volunteering.

### ***Communities, the third sector, and volunteering***

In this section we explore how volunteering is situated at, and builds bridges between, three levels: the community, the voluntary organisation and the individual. Volunteers, volunteer efforts and many voluntary organisations are embedded in a community context. ‘Community’ and ‘neighbourhood’ – in common with volunteering – are not simple descriptive words but ones with shifting and disputed meanings (Taylor, 2002).

Subjectively neighbourhood and community mean different things to different people at different times; each individual's activities, networks and travel patterns shape their concept of neighbourhood and community (Massey, 1994). The community context both influences the causal processes shaping volunteering and can be the target of volunteer efforts (Omoto and Snyder, 2002). Some voluntary organisations (including two of the four organisations where we focused our fieldwork) grow out of attempts to change aspects of the community in which they are embedded in some way. Community development efforts often rely heavily on the actions of volunteers and voluntary work can provide individuals, with important social contact and social networks (Richardson and Mumford, 2002).

Since 1997 'community' has emerged as a key policy arena for economic and social change by several UK government departments. 'Community' in British government parlance is generally used to discuss poor or disadvantaged neighbourhoods (Taylor, 2002). Ideas of community offer resources, social glue, alternative ideas and knowledge which are now seen as essential to society (Taylor, 2002). The concept of social capital has become enormously influential as an explanation for why some communities work better than others. Social capital, according to Putnam's (2000) much cited analysis, consists of the networks, norms and trust that enable individuals and groups to engage in co-operative activity. Putnam's approach has been used by policy makers to justify their agenda of encouraging individuals to volunteer especially the strategy to broaden the volunteer base,<sup>i</sup> as seen in Public Service Arrangement (PSA) targets<sup>ii</sup> (Williams, 2003a) and spatially-targeted schemes, such as New Deal for Communities and Sure Start that aim to address the contextual effects of neighbourhood. Against Putnam, Robert Sampson and colleagues (2005) argue that collective civic engagement has changed rather than declined, and is organisational rather than interpersonal in nature. They place emphasis on conjoint capability; an active sense of

collective engagement; residents of a community working through the third sector to solve problems.

In the UK the voluntary or third sector has been described as being a ‘loose and baggy monster’ (Kendall and Knapp, 1995), comprising organisations and activities that operate on a not-for-profit basis, and are independent of the structures of local and central government. The sector is large, diverse and growing; over one third of its funding comes from statutory sources; a reflection of the scale of partnership working with the public sector (Wilding *et al*, 2006: 3). The latest available data (for 2003/4) reveals that most organisations (87 per cent) have incomes of less than £100,000 (Wilding *et al*, 2006); and many have an uncertain, even precarious income stream. Three of the Brightville organisations examined below are small community-based, and embrace partnership working.

Volunteering is an activity that is freely chosen, does not involve remuneration, and helps or benefits strangers (Zappala, 2000: 1). Volunteering undertaken formally through an organisation is usually distinguished by its context from informal neighbouring and time giving on a one-to-one basis, which is sometimes referred to as the ‘fourth sector’ (Williams, 2003b; Williams and Windebank, 2006). Connections between voluntary work carried out in a neighbourhood and more informal activities associated with care for others can be close (Schervish and Havens, 2002). Some writers (notably Williams, 2003b; see also Williams and Windebank, 2006) argue that a culture of engagement in groups is relatively alien to most people in deprived communities, unlike one-to-one aid. Rather than promoting formal volunteering in such communities he suggests that informal volunteering should be fostered (Williams, 2003b).

While volunteering is intimately associated with the policies of New Labour in the UK it is not new (Prochaska, 1988). The roots of voluntary action can be traced to two central impulses: philanthropy and mutual aid (Davis Smith, 1995). In the Beveridge Report a sharp distinction was made between philanthropy and mutual aid (Deakin, 1995). Self-help and mutual aid are characterised by a common concern and a shared decision to do something about it (Richardson and Mumford, 2002). As such they represent a distinct alternative to those forms of voluntary action which are based on philanthropy and altruism and enshrined in charitable law (Hyatt and England, 1995). In this article we argue that mutual aid and philanthropy resonate strongly in volunteers own accounts of their activity in the community.

Voluntary work has been the subject of Government sponsored surveys and quantitative empirical research undertaken by academics and policy makers in a number of countries (including the identification of a ‘civic core’) (Reed and Selbee, 2001; Zappala, 2000; Murphy et al, 2005). Academics and policy makers have explored voluntary work from individual and organisational perspectives (such as Greenslade and White, 2002; Handy et al, 2005; Hughes and Black, 2002; Zappala and Burrell, 2001; 2002), and we seek to add to our understanding of volunteering by exploring socially shaped explanation and sense-making, and the social, economic and cultural complexity of volunteering, derived from qualitative research embedded in the neo-Durkheimian institutional tradition (Roberts and Devine, 2004). If the evidence can be shown by using methods process tracing and pattern matching to be systematic, a single area case study comprising multiple individual sub-cases will inform theories of motivation (Mahoney, 2003; Rueschemeyer, 2003). However, because the case is specific to the UK, we limit our inferences from the case to contexts that are relevantly similar in the institutional respects that we identify below.

## ***Theory and taxonomy***

The neo-Durkheimian institutional theory was first developed by anthropologist Mary Douglas (1982; Douglas and Ney, 1998; Thompson *et al*, 1990) as an account of the extent of variation in the elementary forms of both tacit and explicit institutions defining social organisation. It has provided powerful explanations for the limited plurality observed in, for example, workplace behaviour (Mars, 1982), organisational dynamics (Peck and 6, 2006) inter-organisational relations (6 *et al*, 2006), organisation of policy makers and their styles of political judgment (6, 2004), and in many other fields (e.g. Coyle and Ellis, 1994; Thompson *et al*, 1999). Here, we show how it can be used to identify and explain the limited variation in basic styles of and motivation for volunteering, and that these results illuminate the amenability of different forms of volunteering to different policy instruments.

Both the propensity to volunteer at all, and the type of volunteering in which people might engage are, the theory suggests, to be explained in significant part by the particular patterns of social organisation and social networks in which people find themselves. One way to think about this is in terms of the effects of social network forms on propensities to involve themselves (or not) in various kinds of social organisation, including different styles of volunteering. A common finding in surveys on volunteering, for example, is that people are most likely to volunteer if they are specifically invited or asked to do so by someone they count as a friend, a colleague or at least an acquaintance (Davis Smith, 1995).

For example, some social network studies argue that people can often use their ‘weak ties’ or ties that span ‘structural holes’ or sections of the network structure that are quite sparsely connected, in quite instrumental ways (Granovetter, 1973, 1995 [1974]; Burt, 1992). In



‘social capital’ terminology, this would be ‘bridging social capital’ (Woolcock, 1998; Putnam, 2000). It is often argued that middle class and better off people both have richer endowments of such acquaintance-like connections that span structural holes in networks, and often operate under tacit institutions in which they will both become capable of using and be expected to use them fairly instrumentally (e.g. Allan, 1990; Oakley and Rajan, 1991). Among people in this situation, we might expect volunteering to be undertaken for instrumental reasons, for ‘getting on’ (cf. de Sousa Briggs, 1998), perhaps in order to acquire more contacts or, for people of working age, to seek out information and opportunities in the labour market, or for those about to leave the labour market or now outside it, to secure opportunities in retirement or to secure social status. Such people are more likely to use formal organisations for their volunteering, because this strategy offers them greater chance of access to information, opportunities and social status.

By contrast, there are many people whose social networks are heavily concentrated in ties to people in the immediate locality, whom they meet rather frequently and who share a sense of common identity and fate. Historically, this configuration has been found more commonly in long established working class communities, some well-established ethnically comparatively homogenous neighbourhoods (not necessarily ghettos, in the strict sense). Again, in Woolcock’s and Putnam’s terms, this would take the form of ‘bonding social capital’. In such settings, the kind of requests for volunteering support that people typically receive and to which they will feel the greatest tacit institutional pressure to respond, or indeed want to respond, are likely to be for neighbourhood based activities in community groups, and where the principal benefits to the volunteer are less about opportunities for getting on than about opportunities for participation in the shared life of the group. We can describe the motivation for volunteering sustained under such tacit institutions as ‘giving to each other’.

Other people are embedded in forms of social organisation in which they have rather clear roles in relation to others, perhaps as parishioners in Roman Catholic congregations or as volunteers in a conventionally structured charity organisation, or employed in a structured organisation, where roles, responsibilities and status distinctions are fairly clearly marked, and where social ties at least to some degree run in convergence with the structure of the organisation, reflecting role and status differences. In the terminology introduced by Woolcock (1998), this would be strongly ‘vertical’ social capital. In such a setting, people are likely to be asked to volunteer in ways that conform to the principles and serve the goals of the organisation of which they are already members. The motivation for volunteering cultivated by such institutions will be more philanthropic. Finally, although Putnam regards people who have rather limited ties to people other than kin or a few longstanding friends or neighbours as lacking in any type of social capital, and whose roles are heavily constrained or prescribed, many studies have suggested that in conditions of adversity in particular, this should be understood as a significant form of social solidarity suited to sustaining coping strategies (e.g. Banfield and Banfield, 1958).

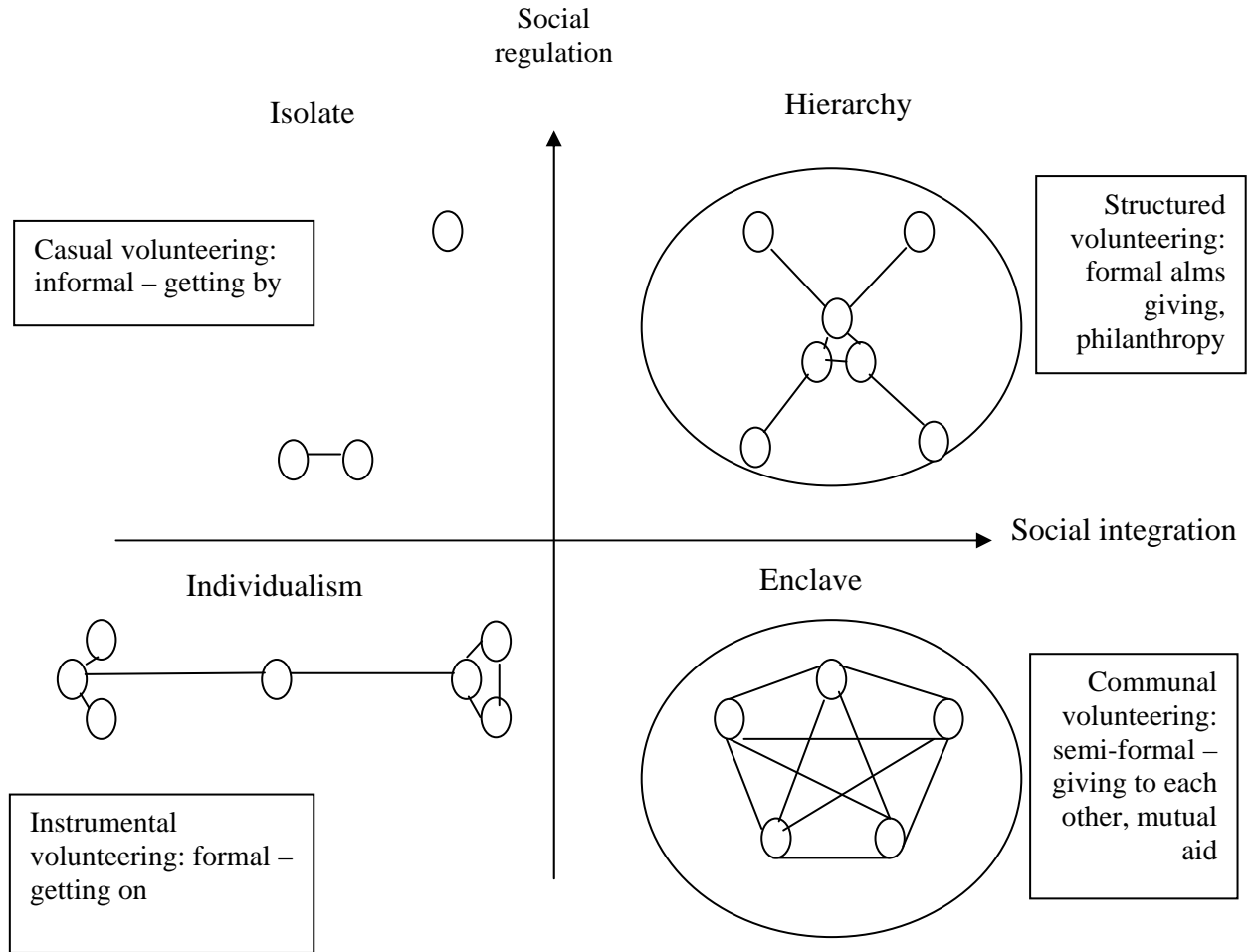
The neo-Durkheimian institutional theoretical tradition argues that these four basic situations are jointly exhaustive of the elementary forms of social institutions and their network signatures. That they suffice for a complete account of elementary forms is explained by the proposition that each is produced by a particular combination of strong or weak social integration and social regulation – respectively the dimensions of informal as well as formal attachment and discipline that Durkheim (1951 [1897]; 1961 [1925]) emphasised. Strong regulation and integration produces *hierarchy* and structured-based volunteering; weak regulation and integration produces *individualism* and instrumental volunteering for personal

gain; strong integration with weak external regulation yields *enclave* and communal volunteering; and finally strong regulation but weak integration produces *isolate* life and casual volunteering.

Figure 1 illustrates the differences using standard sociograms for ideal typical network signatures for the four elementary institutional forms (6 *et al*, 2006). Of course, many people live under hybrid forms representing settlements between two, three or all four in different weights. We situate voluntary action in the context of people's lives in order to understand the qualitative experience of volunteering, specifically why people create (emotional, temporal and physical) space for voluntary work, and how they juggle unpaid voluntary work with other 'work' (paid and unpaid) they undertake. The framework captures four motives and patterns of volunteering: hierarchy (giving alms), enclave (giving back), individualism (getting on) and isolate (getting by), which are described below.

It is a question of some interest whether people whose situation is well described by some combinations of these four elementary forms but with a particular solidarity dominant might be found resident in or indeed volunteering in distinct spatial locales within a neighbourhood or a local community. The theory is useful in helping understand the social context, in which people engage in volunteering.

*Figure 1: Elementary forms of social institutions, their ideal-typical social network signatures and predicted styles of volunteering*



## **Methods**

Much empirical research on volunteering, as discussed above, has used survey methods to determine volunteer motivation against socio-economic variables and other factors such as time devoted to volunteering. Such quantitative research provides a valuable body of evidence for patterns of individual attitudes to volunteer activity across a very wide range of organisational, national and cultural contexts. However, more holistic methods are needed to encompass the social and economic complexity of volunteering. We sought and received funding from the Economic and Social Research Council for a study of volunteering in the context of people's lives in a community with high levels of economic inactivity. The study was designed to understand more about how people volunteering within a disadvantaged community construct and negotiate constraints and opportunities in their daily lives. We adopted a 'case study' approach, using a variety of techniques to collect empirical evidence for local behaviours, identities and experiences within a single community in the English East Midlands (see below). We focused upon social welfare voluntary work because of its significance in contemporary policy debates in the UK.

Case studies are widely used in social research in order to investigate contemporary phenomena within their real life context (Mahoney, 2003). Such research is valuable in the repertoire of policy oriented researchers because it is sensitive to context, detail and complexity in ways that can help to explain links between policy and outcomes for individuals and places (Mahoney, 2003). Social research in this tradition is not based on a logic of statistical generalisation, but a deeper understanding of processes and dynamics. The utility of a single case rests on the fact that propositions have a broader range of application beyond the one case. The one case if well designed, can form the context of discovery and validation of explanatory propositions (Rueschemeyer, 2003: 309). Moreover a single case

can offer persuasive causal explanations (Rueschemeyer, 2003: 318) and through combining causal process tracing and within case pattern matching cross-case identification of likely causal factors can be inferred (Rueschemeyer, 2003).

The case we investigated was formal volunteering in one disadvantaged community in the English East Midlands. We worked with local stakeholders to identify four social welfare organisations that involved volunteers in the community (Box 1). They do not of course cover all the voluntary activity within the community but they are the main sites of volunteer participation in social welfare service delivery. We used a combination of techniques within the overall case study approach:

- Repeated, systematic observation, note taking supported by visual images;
- Collection of documentary evidence (annual reports, working documents, surveys, press cuttings etc);
- Semi-structured interviews (eleven) with key informants who were local stakeholders (officers in local economic development, managers in organisations using volunteers, church workers, local councillors, community activists, and a community police team);
- Focus groups with volunteers (two groups);
- In-depth interviews in the ‘life history’ tradition with a selection of volunteers and former volunteers (twenty seven interviews).

In this article we draw mainly but not exclusively on the interviews with volunteers. Consistent with the case study approach, sample selection was based on mapping and understanding issues rather than the logic of numerical representation appropriate for quantitative studies. Selection was guided by key stakeholders (who were in some cases the gatekeepers who facilitated access) and by themes emerging from observation undertaken in

the community. The interviewees covered the diversity of personal characteristics present in the study sites, for example age, caring responsibilities, employment status, and disability. (See below for more information on characteristics of interviewees.)

The interviews followed a 'life history' design, focusing upon how people explained and reflected upon their past, present and future. Respondents were encouraged to reconstruct key events in the process of becoming and remaining volunteers. The life history approach takes the individual as a unit but is not totally individualistic as a life history can not be told without constant reference to social context and historical change (Musson, 1998). It uncovers how lives move through history and interact with social and institutional structures (Dex, 1991). Interviews were recorded and transcribed in full and analysed by theme, paying careful attention to language used and emphasis given.

### ***Brightville***

Fieldwork took place in Brightville, which developed in the nineteenth century, and had a diverse industrial base spanning coal mining and textiles. It coalesced with a nearby industrial town, Irontown but to this day Brightville's residents retain a strong sense of a separate identity from Irontown. Brightville is composed of two types of 'poor' area: one of largely working class nineteenth century terraced housing, and peripheral post war social housing, both were a poverty cluster since their inception (Lupton, 2003). The community has lost its original economic function, with high levels of economic inactivity and according to the Index of Multiple Deprivation, Brightville is economically deprived (Baines and Hardill, 2005), the kind of place that typically tends to have relatively low levels of volunteering. Moreover in our community there are a limited number of Government-funded community

workers and initiatives, and prior to undertaking the research our contacts in the third sector suggested that there was more grass roots self help, as the ‘burden’ of responsibility for social welfare self help falls heavily upon the individual. This led us to think of it as a place rich in the elusive quality of ‘community spirit’. We felt that fieldwork in such a setting would enable us to contribute to debates on volunteering and the volunteer experience, and the connection or lack of it with paid work.

*Box 1: The voluntary organisations*

**1. Community Centre established 1997**

Community education centre, engaged in service delivery for Irontown’s FE college, and volunteering courses for the Government Project and Community Project  
Volunteers: pool of 3-4 of working age undertake regular duties, current manager was once a volunteer  
Established by former Brightville resident.

**2. Government Project established 2003**

Assist families and young children to be successful and confident in their lives.  
Volunteers: about 27 (all women), plus ‘parent helpers’, those who can not make the regular commitment demanded of volunteers (must have a child below 5 years)

**3. Family Charity established 1989**

Offers volunteer home visiting support to families (with one child below 5 years) under stress.  
Volunteers 63 (largely women, of all ages), must have been a parent, and be able to commit to regularly visit families.  
Established by social work professionals

**4. Community Project established 1992**

Community service organisation: luncheon club, befriending, shopping, gardening and DIY etc. Some voluntary work occurs weekly, other work is more episodic  
Volunteers: 103 (43 male, 60 female)  
Founded by Brightville women, became formal organisation in 1994.

The four fieldwork sites (Box 1) employ paid workers and are heavily reliant upon volunteers giving time weekly to deliver services to the community. Prior to volunteering they are required to undertake a training course. The four organisations also engage with the community through organising events, such as Fun Days in the summer, Christmas parties and fund raising coffee mornings.



We interviewed current and former volunteers, and paid workers who also volunteer. Half live in Brightville and half in Irontown. The interviewees were 19 volunteers (15 women, 4 men) and eight paid workers (5 women, 3 men). Of the paid worker group five were also volunteers at the time of the interview and three had come to the sites as volunteers but no longer volunteered. Three-quarters of those interviewed were women; this gender bias is perhaps a reflection of the nature of the voluntary work undertaken by the four organisations (see Murphy *et al*, 2005). On the whole volunteering tasks were gendered, with men volunteering as drivers or to do DIY, and women as befrienders, preparing meals etc. The length of their volunteering experience varied from one who was just completing the training course, to others who had been volunteering for over a decade. Individuals' average weekly time commitment to volunteering in the case study sites ranged from two hours to around 15. Seven of the 19 volunteers were in waged work, two more aspired to engage in the labour market in the future (one of whom was in training, the other on Job Seekers Allowance). Most of the others were in receipt of incapacity benefit or retired. There were two partnered mothers who expressed no interest in paid work and a lone mother who was a full-time carer for her severely disabled son. Pseudonyms are used to protect the identity of individuals, voluntary organisations and the community.

Volunteering, as the literature cited above suggests, usually combines elements of self interest and giving to others. Giving in response to a perceived need was prominent in the narratives of Brightville volunteers. When interviewees emphasised the value of their activity to others there were two distinct themes: giving to people they perceived as different (and less fortunate) and supporting others with shared experiences. Both these stances can be described as forms of altruism, but altruism is too general a term to capture its variety and

context. The two historical stances towards volunteering – philanthropy and mutual aid – resonate strongly with these attitudes and personal histories (Baines and Hardill, 2005). As discussed above, the neo-Durkheimian taxonomy is a powerful tool, widely adapted in analysis of aspects public policy for understanding the likely forms in which self- and other-regarding motives might be combined. We adapt it here as a framework for presenting empirical case material from the narratives of the Brightville volunteers.

*Table 1: Case studies of volunteering*

<i>'Type / pseudonym</i>	<i>Brightville Organisation/s</i>	<i>Household structure/ residence</i>	<i>Age</i>	<i>Employment status</i>	<i>Other unpaid activity</i>	<i>Explanation for volunteering</i>
<b><i>Giving alms</i></b> Stella	Community Project	Living alone Irontown	60+	Retired after 32 years with Health Service	Active grandparent; church worker	'I feel that I'm fortunate and perhaps I should be doing something to help other people who are less fortunate'.
<b><i>Giving to each other</i></b> Martin	Community Project	Mother Brightville	Late 20s	On Incapacity Benefit because of ill health	History of voluntary work, doing some skills updating	'I may be on Incapacity Benefit doing nothing ... but I am doing things for the community and helping myself in the process'.
<b><i>Getting on</i></b> Heather	Community Project	Single mother of 4, cares for disabled brother Brightville	30-40	Studying at local college, on nursing access course	Homecare; informal volunteer to neighbours	Volunteers to improve her position in labour market
<b><i>Getting by</i></b> Sarah	Family Charity	Living alone Irontown	40-50	Full-time manager, public sector	History of voluntary work, close to daughter and parents	volunteers to fill 'an emotional gap...cynical me'.

## **Giving alms**

This group of volunteers comprised six women (aged 40+) living outside Brightville, who were drawn to help in the community via the structured volunteering opportunities offered by the Community Project and the Family Charity. They have identified an unmet need and they want to make a difference. Some explained that they feel ‘fortunate’ and as a result responded to advertisements or appeals for volunteers. One of the Family Charity volunteers, for example, said: ‘I’ve got loads of friends – how isolated you must be to not be part of the community’. They have strong social networks and some are involved in formal Church activities. Most have had a history of paid work, especially in hierarchical organisations (such as the National Health Service). They offer vertical social capital.

Stella (Table 3) is typical of this group. She searched out volunteering activities within Brightville. After her retirement Stella thought she ‘really ought to do something’ but was unsure what. She was already an active church member and became more involved in the care of her grandchild, who lives nearby. But she wanted to do more. She sees herself as – through the Community Project – helping people less fortunate than herself. The Community Project, ‘are trying to help people in this community which I suppose could be described as a bit of a deprived community and I try to help them’. Stella is engaged in ‘alms giving’, philanthropic good works, she ‘extends’ her care-giving ‘outward’ to people in Brightville (Davis Smith, 1995). Philanthropy is associated with altruism, usually discussed from the perspective of ‘rational utilitarianism’ and can be explained in terms of either ‘pure selflessness’ or pragmatic self interest; an alternative is ‘identification with the needs of others’ (Schervish and Havens, 2002: 49). It would be misleading to reduce Stella’s motivation either to selfishness extended to a narrow group or to straightforward altruism, even though it has aspects of both of these. Rather, her location in a hierarchical social

ordering is the underlying factor supporting a motivation that is necessarily both self- and other-rewarding, but in a different mix from that which we find in the other three contexts.

### **Giving to each other**

Eleven interviewees aged 20+ (nine women and two men) ten of whom live in Brightville talked about their volunteering as a response to a problem or experience shared with their 'clients'. Martin (Table 1) cannot take up paid work because of mental health problems; and he values volunteering because it takes him out of the house. He has a history of voluntary work, helping elderly Brightville residents who are housebound, with whom he has great empathy, so every week he shops for them and helps them informally too. He also does occasional extra work for the Community Project, such as distributing leaflets. Through volunteering he has more self esteem, and is now improving his basic literacy and numeracy skills

So I may be on Incapacity Benefit doing nothing and not working but I am doing things for the community and helping myself in the process.

Family Charity volunteer Claire, for example, had benefited from the Family Charity herself in a crisis. In generalising from her experience she said of the Family Charity, 'I think it's really to help the community help themselves'.

### **Getting on**

A third group, composed of three volunteers aged 30+ (2 women and one man) volunteer for the Family Charity and the Community Project to 'get on' as a way of developing skills and experience of value in the labour market. Heather (Table 1) lives in Brightville and has gained confidence through preparing to volunteer and being a volunteer for the Community Project (training courses). She feels she has come to respect older people too. After

volunteering for one year she had sufficient confidence to begin an Access Course for nursing, thereby fulfilling an ambition she has held since childhood. Grant lives in Irontown and holds a part-time job which he undertakes at a weekend, and was completing his volunteers course for the Family Charity at the time of the interview. He searched out volunteering opportunities in Brightville in the hope that volunteering would enable him improve his chances of becoming a social worker. Grant was introduced to the Family Charity through a friend of his wife: 'It was a way of getting inside the community to help people without having to spend years at college'. But his hope for a new career in social care has been frustrated by the need for training, 'I can't put that on to my family'. At the same time, he expressed strong feelings that he has something to offer families that need help:

You are able to give something to those that maybe haven't got the support that I've got, or I've had. I mean when I went through my divorce I had nobody... I've been there and it's horrible.

### **Getting by**

For the four volunteers aged 40+ (two men and two women) in this group volunteering is to help them 'get by' and is more ad hoc than for the three other groups of volunteers. They explained that they entered volunteering as a response to a milestone life event, and that it fills something missing or an emotional gap in life. This is referred to elsewhere in discussions of volunteer motivation as 'social adjustment' (Knapp *et al*, 1995). Irontown resident Sarah (Table 1) explained what volunteering for the Family Charity means to her after her recent divorce and her daughter's growing independence:

The fact that there's another family that needs you is perhaps filling an emotional gap for me. I think sometimes I am actually just filling an emotional gap [with the volunteering]. Cynical me!

While some like Sarah responded to a press campaign, Lily was prompted to volunteer when asked. Lily undertakes strongly gendered voluntary work, helping at a luncheon club run by the Community Project; which she is old enough to attend herself as a service user. Retirement and preparation for retirement may prompt the development of new sets of social contacts, drawing upon attachments based in religious, voluntary, community and leisure associations, as is vividly illustrated by Lily's personal story. Lily is a neighbour of Jean, who runs the luncheon club, and who recruited her. She is a retired single woman who has lived all her life in Brightville, and worked for 45 years for one employer in Irontown. She had mixed feelings about leaving work and talked about retirement in terms of loss of personal identity (Barnes and Parry, 2004). She explained that she has found a new sense of importance and value by helping at the Community Project. Jean talked proudly of how Lily had gained confidence since her involvement with the Community Project. She explained this by telling us that at first Lily would not call out the bingo numbers but now she loves to do so. Lily is very committed to the Community Project and is identified as a reliable volunteer by Jean.

### ***Conclusion***

These case studies demonstrate clearly that there is a diversity of styles of volunteering, and that there is in some instances a blurring of status boundaries between volunteer and service user. Moreover, the life histories show clearly that rationales for volunteering are cultivated and sustained by institutional settings, the most important dimensions of which can best be

measured by the degree of social integration and regulation. Each narrative illustrates the linkage between the institutional setting, the network forms and the explanation for becoming and remaining a volunteer.

Promoting volunteering must, if this argument is accepted, therefore use instruments at two levels. First, initiatives must be designed and targeted to those with each of the four basic motivations. Such initiatives have to be selected to reflect the relative weighting of each of these forms in each community. Secondly, in the longer term, initiatives need to address the underlying institutional settings that sustain those motivations.

There are already plenty of initiatives to appeal to those who might volunteer to 'get on'. Yet in the Brightville study, interviewees only rarely explained their volunteering in terms of 'getting on' through personal skills development. Appealing to comparative isolates who 'get by' is best done through informal networks, very particular 'word of mouth' requests from individuals rather than formal organisations (Williams, 2003b; Williams and Windebank, 2006). Enclaved groups are most likely to be reached by appeals that work with the self-recognitions and classifications used by local community and neighbourhood groups, and also by face-to-face contact.

At the second level of instruments for institutional change, the theory argues that it is critical to influence informal as well as formal accountabilities. Recent studies, for example, suggest that, where there is a case for cultivating enclaved styles of volunteering, a key institution-building strategy is to address the overall density of community-based non-profit organisations that matters most, for this creates organisational level enclaved ordering which can work indirectly to support 'giving to each other' volunteering (Sampson *et al*, 2005).

However, each of the elementary forms of volunteering have their weaknesses. Individualism can cultivate instrumentalism; getting by can be unfocused and unstrategic; giving alms can become paternalistic; giving to each other can become sectarian and inward-looking. At the institution-building level, therefore, it makes most sense to cultivate *requisite variety*, or sufficient articulation of all four in some kind of settlement, preventing any one form from dominating and for each to offset the weaknesses of the others (6, 2004; Verweij and Thompson, 2006). For example, in Brightville, tendencies toward enclaving and giving to each other are to some degree offset by the involvement of volunteers from outside the community creating bridging social capital, sometimes drawing on more individualistic or hierarchical institutions and instrumental or philanthropic motivations. Grant's voluntary work, for example, although undertaken largely to improve his chances of getting into social work, is potentially building social networks that span Brightville and Irontown. The requisite variety principle therefore requires careful attention to the spatial context for volunteering. Excessive focus on the neighbourhood may lead to too heavy an emphasis on enclaved and isolate forms; larger spatial units need to be addressed if adequate imbrication is to be cultivated between the enclaved and isolate forms on the one hand and the individualistic and hierarchical ones on the other. Ties beyond the community are at least as important as community self-help.

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## Notes

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<sup>i</sup> Schemes to promote volunteering for All (launched by the Home Office, March 2006 (<http://www.gnn.gov.uk/Content/Detail.asp?ReleaseID=190528&NewsAreaID=2>), and 2005 being named The Year of the Volunteer.

<sup>ii</sup> Such as PSA 6 of the Spending Review 2004 to increase voluntary activity by individuals at risk of social exclusion.