

INVESTING IN VOLUNTEERS FINAL REPORT



ALONE

May 27, 2019 – May 30, 2019

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ASSESSMENT SUMMARY

IIV HOST ORGANISATION:	Volunteer Ireland
ASSESSOR:	Sacha Johnston
NAME OF LEAD ASSESSOR:	Sandra Adair
1ST ASSESSMENT/RENEWAL:	1st Renewal
ASSESSMENT OUTCOME:	Met
CONDITIONS IF ANY:	
DATE CONDITIONS MET:	
FINAL ASSESSMENT DECISION:	

ORGANISATION SUMMARY

ALONE is a national organisation that works with older people over the age of 60 who are socially isolated, living in poverty or crisis and supports them to age at home. ALONE provides direct support to hundreds of older people in Ireland every week through four main services – Support Coordination, Befriending & Supports, Housing with Support and Campaigns for Change.

ALONE's vision is for a society where older people are included as valued and empowered members of the community. The organisation's mission is to enable older people to age in the place of their choice and to work to ensure quality of life and well-being.

The organisation provides services in Dublin County and City as well as in the North East of Ireland, Carlow, Kilkenny and Donegal.

At the time of the renewal ALONE had 837 active volunteers and 282 in the process of being recruited and placed. Most volunteers (780) are befrienders. Other volunteer roles include Cinema Club, Telephone Befrienders, Volunteer Leadership Group and Project Volunteers who work on specific projects within the organisation. Befrienders are matched with an older person and they commit to visiting that older person for 1 hour a week for a minimum of 1 year.

ALONE receives 22% of its funding from the Health Services Executive and the rest of its funding comes from fundraising and rental income and investments. The Volunteer Manager is responsible for the recognition budget for volunteers and the rest of the volunteer programme's costs are accounted for in the overall budget for the organisation.

Since the Investing in Volunteer's Standard was achieved in 2015 ALONE's volunteer programme has grown considerably and the staffing structure has changed. The number of volunteers has increased from 160 at the time of the first assessment in 2015 to now over 800 active volunteers. A key factor in growing the number of volunteers was the re-structuring and re-designing of the training programme to facilitate the training of more volunteers while still ensuring a high level of quality. In 2017 ALONE doubled the number of volunteers it could train compared to the previous year. The volunteer programme was led by the Human Resources (HR) Coordinator along with two Befriending Coordinators who provided the day-to-day management of befriending volunteers. The Volunteer Manager position was created in 2018 and has been filled by the current manager since that time. The Volunteer Manager has overall responsibility for the volunteer programme. Along with the Volunteer Manager, there are 2 Volunteer Support Officers in Dublin and 7 Service Coordinators outside of Dublin with responsibility for supporting volunteers. The Volunteer Support Officers recruit, train and provide day to day support and management of the volunteers in their geographical remit. The Service Coordinators recruit, train, match and support the volunteers in their geographical area. There are also 8 Support Coordinators in the Dublin and Kildare area whose responsibilities include matching the volunteer with an older person and providing support to both the volunteer and older person. The Volunteer Manager reports to the Head of Operations and the Volunteer Support Officers and Support Coordinators report directly to the Service Manager at each site.



ALONE has committed to maintaining its standard of practice since their assessment and has addressed the development points in their last assessment report. There is now in place a 'Death of an Older Person Procedure' that provides clarity on the next steps to ensure matters relating to a death are treated with respect, dignity and sensitivity. As well, a recent partnership with Laya Healthcare has led to the implementation of a dedicated support line for volunteers experiencing mental health issues. With regard to diversity monitoring, ALONE created a diversity procedure and moved the volunteer application form onto a digital platform where they can monitor certain aspects of diversity.

SAMPLING

SAMPLING RATIONALE:

Click or tap here to enter text

NUMBER OF SITES, BRANCHES, LOCATIONS:	5
NUMBER INCLUDED IN INTERVIEW SAMPLE:	5

NUMBER OF VOLUNTEERS:	837
NUMBER INTERVIEWED:	52
NUMBER AS % OF TOTAL:	6%

NUMBER OF VOLUNTEER ROLES:	5
NUMBER OF ROLES SAMPLED BY INTERVIEW:	5
NUMBER AS % OF TOTAL:	100%

NUMBER OF STAFF:	51
NUMBER INTERVIEWED:	6
WERE TRUSTEES INTERVIEWED?	Yes

WRITTEN EVIDENCE:

Provided with the self-assessment were:

Volunteer Handbook including various policy statements

Annual Report

Reviewed as part of the assessment:

Recruitment Procedure

Strategic Plan

Recruitment Poster

Diversity Procedure

Death of an Older Person Procedure



SUMMARY OF PRACTICE

INDICATOR 1

There is an expressed commitment to the involvement of volunteers, and recognition throughout the organisation that volunteering is a two-way process which benefits volunteers and the organisation.

ALONE has a clear and comprehensive Volunteer Handbook which includes policy statements relevant to volunteers and outlines the commitment the organisation has to involving volunteers. In a welcome note in the manual the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) says, “Alone was founded by volunteers and the spirit of volunteerism remains at the heart of the organisation...Volunteers are essential to our organisation and show how people in the community can look after each other”. This ethos is echoed by a board member who said, “The befriending service is the core of what we do and without volunteers we could not run the service”. The Volunteer Handbook contains several policy statements that pertain to volunteers and staff including safety, confidentiality and gift giving. All volunteers interviewed were familiar with the policies in the handbook.

All staff and board members interviewed could articulate why the organisation involves volunteers and the value they bring to the programme. A staff member confirmed, “Volunteers carry out the main service we provide – befriending. We could not do it without them”. The CEO echoed, “We are a voluntary agency. It is in our DNA. It just isn’t possible to run our programme without volunteers. And for the older person they know the difference between a staff caring for them and a volunteer. The befriending service can only be done by volunteers. The volunteer represents the community to the older person and shows them the community cares”. A volunteer said, “They can’t pay people to do this and volunteers are at the heart of the organisation”. Another volunteer said, “You would never get the range of characters and ages with staff alone. ALONE recruits all walks of life for their volunteers to match the wide range of older people needing to be befriended”.

It was evident that volunteers gained significantly from their experience. One volunteer said, “I could be dragging myself to visit my lady after a long day of work, but I always leave lighter. It is so good for me”. Another volunteer stated, “I feel a huge benefit as I know she looks forward to me visiting. I know I make a difference in her life. I hope I am also being an ambassador for ALONE. When you see someone down and sick and you helped them get the support they need it makes you feel good”. Another volunteer noted, “It is almost like I have a grandma – it provides us both with friendship”.

The Volunteer Handbook and related policies are reviewed as part of an annual review of all policies and procedures led by the Quality and Compliance Officer. The Volunteer Manager confirmed this, stating, “This current handbook is a new version which is available on line and the intention is for it to be reviewed on an ongoing basis as and when needed. As well, we review all policies as part of our quality process annually which is led by our Quality and Compliance Officer”.



INDICATOR 2

The organisation commits appropriate resources to working with all volunteers, such as money, management, staff time and materials.

ALONE has a full-time Volunteer Manager with overall responsibility for the volunteer programme. In addition to the Volunteer Manager there are currently 2 Volunteer Support Officers in Dublin and 7 staff outside of Dublin as well as 8 Support Coordinators in Community Health Organisations (CHO 9,7,6) whose job responsibilities include volunteer support. The Head of Operations oversees the Volunteer Manager and the Service Manager in each CHO manages the Support Coordinators and/or the Volunteer Support Officers in their respective service area. The staff with responsibility for volunteers have these duties outlined in their job descriptions.

The Volunteer Manager has attended volunteer management training with the local Volunteer Centre as well as additional training related to Volunteer Management with Volunteer Ireland. The Volunteer Manager started working with ALONE in an administrative capacity, moving on to a support role within the volunteer programme and then becoming Volunteer Manager in 2018 when the organisation restructured the programme in response to the significant growth in the number of volunteers involved in the organisation. While the Volunteer Support Officers and Support Coordinators with responsibility for volunteers have received in-house training by the Volunteer Manager it is suggested that they attend volunteer management training either with their local volunteer centre or with Volunteer Ireland.

There are several regularly scheduled meetings where issues related to volunteers and/or the volunteer programme are discussed. The Volunteer Manager meets with the Volunteer Support Officers monthly, with the Head of Operations weekly and with the Service Managers bi-monthly. The Volunteer Manager stated, "We also have ad hoc meetings whenever needed and are in regular contact in the office or over the phone with the staff outside of Dublin". Another staff member said, "I discuss volunteer issues with my line manager here and then include [the Volunteer Manager] if needs be". The Head of Operations confirmed, "All staff are aware of the needs and responsibilities of volunteers. I have a weekly meeting with the Volunteer Manager where all things volunteer related are discussed in terms of the overall programme. Specific issues would be dealt with by Volunteer Support Officers and their respective teams or the Volunteer Manager depending on the issue".

ALONE's strategic plan 2019 – 2023 was launched in May. In the foreword, the plan states, "This strategic plan was developed in consultation with the ALONE Board of Directors, staff, volunteers, and older people". The volunteer programme and volunteers are referred to throughout the plan, including specific strategic goals to grow the volunteer programme over the next 4 years. A section on volunteers is included in the plan. It begins, "ALONE Volunteers are central to our organisation... The role and supports provided by volunteers will grow and develop over the lifetime of this strategic plan". A board member confirmed, "Volunteers were consulted as

part of the strategic planning process. Those who wanted to, had a platform to bring thoughts and ideas to the board and the wider organisation". One volunteer echoed, "I have been to a few meetings about planning for the future. It was a really good experience - very open and people's ideas and opinions were encouraged".

The programme is funded primarily through fundraising and rental and investment income, with additional funding from the Health Service Executive. The CEO and a board member both confirmed the organisation works hard to ensure funding is available for all its programmes. The staff interviewed advised that the budget allocated to volunteering was sufficient and the Volunteer Manager confirmed the budget included the actual costs of volunteering, including recruitment and recognition.

INDICATOR 3

The organisation is open to involving volunteers who reflect the diversity of the local community and actively seeks to do this in accordance with its stated aims.

It is clear that ALONE is a welcoming and open environment where volunteers and staff feel respected and valued. This was evidenced by statements from volunteers such as, "Yes, at the training you got every walk of life – young, older, men and women, people from Ireland or not. The organisation is very supportive and welcoming". "Definitely it is an open organisation. I remember from the training there were people there from all different backgrounds and countries". "ALONE would never make a judgement about you. They take you as you are". "There was a really wide breadth of people at the training so the organisation must put out an image that is welcoming to all kinds of people".

ALONE is committed to equal opportunities and the Equal Opportunities statement, which is included in the Volunteer Handbook, makes this commitment explicit. There is a Diversity Procedure in place. The Volunteer Manager confirmed this.

The images in annual reports, the Volunteer Handbook, online and in the newsletter, reflect the diversity of the volunteers in ALONE. One volunteer said, "You can see from their Facebook page that it is diverse". Volunteers heard about ALONE from a variety of sources including media campaigns, church announcements, word of mouth, recruitment fairs, Facebook and I-VOL - Volunteer Ireland's national online database of volunteering opportunities.

While the current application form asks some information in relation to diversity it is suggested that more information (such as nationality, gender, disability) is gathered to ensure that all aspects of diversity are being monitored. A separate document should be created for this diversity monitoring.

INDICATOR 4

The organisation develops appropriate roles for volunteers in line with its aims and objectives, which are of value to the volunteers.

At the time of assessment ALONE had 5 volunteer roles. The Project Volunteer role however is tailored to specific roles and so there are several project volunteers each doing a different, specific role as outlined in their role description. This was confirmed by the Volunteer Manager. There is a role description for each role which is available online on their website and is issued to volunteers during the recruitment process. Most volunteers interviewed remembered that they had received the role description either upon inquiring about volunteering or at the introductory information session. One volunteer confirmed, “Yes, we were given a role description at the start and there was a volunteer agreement we signed”. Another volunteer said, “Yes, at the first session they discussed expectations and went over the role”. Another volunteer stated, “I was emailed the handbook and role description”. The requirements of the role and skills needed are outlined in the role description. Volunteers consistently remarked on the clarity of the role requirements and the usefulness of additional material provided in the Volunteer Handbook to further support volunteers in understanding and meeting the demands of the role. One volunteer stated, “When I started we got the ‘bible’ as I call it, with all the policies in it”.

Roles that are currently open are advertised on the organisation’s website. Role descriptions are available to view on the website as well as included in print format for information sessions and other recruitment events. All roles are presented in a clear format, laying out the key responsibilities, duties, qualities and experience required. The number and diversity of roles within the organisation means there is something available to suit a wide range of volunteers in terms of their skills, interests, abilities, experience and availability.

Volunteers consistently noted the meaningfulness of the roles they were given. They felt they were useful, practical and made a significant difference to the clients and the service in general. Volunteers consistently reported that they gained skills and personal growth from their experiences. Volunteers stated, “It opens your eyes to the isolation older people feel. It has made me feel very lucky for everything I have in my own life”. “I had never worked with a blind person and it was amazing to learn what to do and now when I see a blind person I am much more inclined to say hello and interact. Volunteering has opened up that for me”. “I have learned about the value of the commitment – of the impact of the visit. This is someone you can’t let down”.

There is scope for roles to be adapted and developed based on individual skills. The Volunteer Manager confirmed, “If people have a certain skill set we will try to create a role specifically for them, for example recently a role was created in relation to the development of our Bfriend app.” Another volunteer said, “I changed from befriending to another role because it better suited my skills”. Another volunteer said, “I was asked to help in a new project they were developing. I had an opportunity to use my previous skills and lead a bit in the process”.

INDICATOR 5

The organisation is committed to ensuring that, as far as possible, volunteers are protected from physical, financial and emotional harm arising from volunteering.

The organisation takes risk assessment into consideration in everything it does. Each volunteer role within ALONE is risk assessed by the Quality and Compliance Officer in conjunction with the Volunteer Manager and the relevant manager in the service. The Volunteer Manager confirmed, “We discuss risk in every Quality and Compliance meeting we have as well as at board and sub-committee meetings”.

Volunteers are covered by the ALONE’s Public Liability and Personal Accident insurance. This is stated in the Volunteer Handbook and was confirmed by the Volunteer Manager.

All volunteers reported that the organisation takes safety seriously and that they felt safe in their roles. One volunteer stated, “The line is not blurred, ALONE are so good at being clear about not putting yourself in an unsafe situation. You feel they are with you there even though they aren’t physically there”. Another volunteer said, “Oh, absolutely I feel safe”. Volunteers consistently noted that the high standard and relevance of the training programme helped them feel safe. Volunteers said, “Training covered all kinds of situations that would make you feel unsafe. It was made really clear what the procedures and policies were”. Scenarios at training showed you how to handle situations that might make you unsafe. We were told if you don’t feel safe, then don’t go in and always let someone else know where you are when you are meeting the volunteer”.

The Volunteer Handbook provides a statement on the reimbursement of out-of-pocket expenses explaining that it is not viable for the organisation to reimburse expenses, such as mileage. In emergency situations, such as needing to take an older person to the hospital in a taxi, a volunteer can claim back the expense. This is explained in the Volunteer Handbook and was confirmed by the Volunteer Manager. The Volunteer Handbook also states, “However, we believe that the cost of volunteering should not prevent a person from volunteering. Therefore, in certain circumstances, we are able to reimburse for preapproved expenses such as transport costs”.

The organisation has all the relevant data protection policies in place and these are referenced in the Volunteer Handbook. The Volunteer Manager confirmed that all personal volunteer details and files are kept in accordance with data protection guidelines. Volunteers were unanimously clear on the importance of confidentiality with regard to client information. One volunteer said, “Confidentiality is so important and whatever we talk about never goes further than that”. Another volunteer said, “We got written material about how to handle calls which included policies like privacy and confidentiality, which is so important”.

INDICATOR 6

The organisation is committed to using fair, efficient and consistent recruitment procedures for all potential volunteers.

Recruitment of volunteers is on an on-going basis. Current vacancies and expressions of interest forms are included on the website. All staff and volunteers were aware of the recruitment and selection process and knew that the recruitment process included Garda Vetting for all volunteer roles. Most volunteers were able to consistently state the steps involved in the recruitment process for ALONE. Most volunteers recalled completing an application form, attending an information session, having an interview, as well as submitting two references and completing a Garda Vetting form. One volunteer said, "I called them to say I was interested in volunteering and was emailed back and invited to an information evening where I had a one-to-one conversation with a staff member. I also filled in an application form and Garda Vetting form and was asked for references."

The expectations are clearly outlined in the role description and volunteers stated this was also discussed at the information session and interview stage. One volunteer stated, "Expectations would have been spoken about from the start at the information session, then again at training and with the staff member who facilitated the matching with the older person". Another volunteer said, "There is a one year commitment of meeting your older person once per week and that was clear from the start". Another volunteer stated, "The information session was really good. It covered everything you needed to know about the role and the organisation".

Volunteers complete an expression of interest form which they can submit by email or by post/in person and they are then invited to an information session. These sessions take place at least monthly, and sometimes more often depending on the number of volunteers interested and vacancies available. The information session provides volunteers with an overview of the organisation and the role. At the end of the session informal interviews are conducted. One volunteer said, "The first night was a presentation about the organisation and the role. At the end of that I spoke one-to-one with a staff member - like an interview". The Volunteer Manager confirmed that most applicants are successful, but when an applicant is not successful they are notified at this stage and are signposted to other opportunities through the I-VOL national database of volunteer opportunities and/or the local volunteer centre. There is a recruitment procedure in place and it is consistently applied to all volunteers. The information collected is appropriate to the roles within the organisation.

All volunteers interviewed confirmed they underwent Garda Vetting and were asked to submit two references. One volunteer stated, "I know they called my reference because my referee told me they were contacted". Another volunteer said, "I had to complete the Garda Vetting application and provide two references". The Garda Vetting procedure and how the organisation makes decisions around disclosures is clearly outlined in the Garda Vetting Policy. The Volunteer Manager confirmed, "A conviction does not automatically exclude someone from volunteering with us. It depends on the conviction that comes back. It may not be relevant to the role. The decision is made by myself and the Human Resources Manager".

INDICATOR 7

Clear procedures are put into action for introducing new volunteers to their role, the organisation, its work, policies, practices and relevant personnel.

Most volunteers interviewed confirmed they attended an information evening and training relevant to their role. Some volunteers met with staff one-to-one if they were unable to attend the group information and training sessions. Befriending volunteers consistently stated they were accompanied by a staff member on their first visit to their older person. One volunteer said, “For the first visit the Service Coordinator comes with you and that really helped me to feel secure and know what was going on.” Another volunteer confirmed, “Someone went with me for the first time and the previous befriender did a handover”. Project Volunteers who volunteer in the office stated that on their first day they were introduced to the staff and volunteers, health and safety procedures were explained and they were shown around the office. One volunteer said, “Yes, I was introduced to all the staff and trained in what I was meant to do and they went through the policies with me”. Another volunteer echoed, “Yes they would walk anyone who is new around the office and introduce them to all the staff and volunteers”.

Befriending volunteers undergo a mandatory training session after attending the information session. Some Project Volunteers receive role specific training as and when necessary. The Volunteer Manager confirmed, “Befriending training is compulsory and Project Volunteers get an induction and then one-to-one ‘on the job’ training for specific roles”. All volunteers spoke about the standard of the training they received and consistently highlighted the role playing and scenario sections of the training as excellent. One volunteer said, “I think the training was really thorough – it showed you situations and how to handle various scenarios like how to handle gifts which I would never thought of until I found myself in that situation”. Another volunteer said, “Without the training I would not have known certain things about giving and receiving gifts and I also learned about the whole story of ALONE”. Another volunteer said, “The training was exceptional. Second to none”.

All volunteers interviewed were clear on the boundaries of their role as volunteers and felt staff were clear about this as well. One volunteer said, “Boundaries are clear. We did a lot of scenarios as part of training. Your role is not to be driving them to appointments for example or caring for them. You are there as a friendly face”. Other volunteers echoed, “We know from the training to stay clear of financial issues and also don’t get into personal things like politics. ALONE encourages you to keep everything neutral, like ‘going dutch’ if out for a coffee with your older person”. “They taught us a lot about the boundaries in the training”. “I understand the boundaries very clearly. I am a befriender, not a carer or social worker”. “I know not to ask any personal questions”.

When asked about the complaints procedure, volunteers consistently stated they would feel comfortable going directly to their contact person in ALONE or the Volunteer Manager. One volunteer said, “I know I can go back to ALONE all the time and they gave us the confidence to know that they are always there to help and support us. I could ring them with any issues or any problems”. Another volunteer said, “I would ring my support coordinator and the issue always gets resolved quickly”. With regard to

more serious complaints the Head of Operations confirmed, “We follow a procedure for handling complaints. If it is a significant incident we follow the procedure for Notifiable Events. The issue is raised first with staff within 2 to 3 days and then within 2 to 3 days with the Board”. With regard to volunteers behaving inappropriately, volunteers were aware that the procedure is explained in the Volunteer Handbook. Volunteers consistently said that any issues that do arise are dealt with fairly and quickly. One volunteer confirmed, “Yes – a volunteer wasn’t clear on the boundaries of the role, but it was handled very quickly by ALONE”.

INDICATOR 8

The organisation takes account of the varying support and supervision needs of volunteers.

All volunteers were aware of the type of support available to them and all felt supported in their role. All volunteers agreed that staff were always there to listen and help and were very open-minded. Volunteers said, “I have the Coordinator’s number and I haven’t had to use it, but I know they are there if I needed to. It gives you the confidence that if there is a situation I need help with that they are there”. “They rang me after my first visit to just check-in and see how I was. It is really nice to know they care and to be contacted. They gave me some tips on how to handle a situation with an older person”. “They are brilliant. They really support you”. “They are in contact by phone regularly and email as well, so if ever I needed them I know I could contact any of them”. “ALONE are quite conscious of letting you know you can reach out and there is a Volunteer Leadership Group in my area that I can go to as well”.

Most volunteers interviewed reported being called regularly by Volunteer Support Officers or Support Coordinators to check-in with them about how they were doing and whether they needed any help and/or support. The Volunteer Manager confirmed that check-in calls were an important part of the Support Coordinator and Volunteer Support Officer duties. Additional support is provided through the Volunteer Leadership Group. Experienced volunteers with ALONE have an opportunity to be part of a Volunteer Leadership Group (VLG). This role was developed to provide support and mentorship to new volunteers and provide a conduit for feedback to the Volunteer Manager. While some VLG members enjoyed their role, many of the VLGs interviewed commented that the logistics of contacting and supporting up to 15 or 16 volunteers was too difficult. It is suggested that the Volunteer Leadership Group programme be reviewed and adapted to suit both the volunteer’s capacity and the organisation’s needs.

Volunteers across the board agreed they could refuse demands that they felt were unrealistic or that they did not have the skills to carry out. None of the volunteers interviewed reported being asked by staff to do tasks beyond the scope of their role. Volunteers were clear on how to handle unreasonable requests by the older person they visit. One volunteer said, “I was getting a lot of texts from a family member of the older person I visit. I spoke to my contact person in ALONE and was supported to say and respond the way I wanted to”. Another volunteer said, “As someone who

finds it hard to say 'no', the training was really helpful to give me confidence to know it is ok to say no to things outside my role".

All volunteers interviewed reported feeling comfortable giving feedback to the organisation. Volunteers named the following ways in which they provide feedback; surveys, at workshops, emails and phone calls. One volunteer said, "You can always email them. They contact you often and they are so willing listen". Another volunteer said, "They run regular workshops for volunteers and you can always give feedback then". The Volunteer Manager confirmed "We survey volunteers annually and the next one will be going out in August or September of this year". While all volunteers interviewed knew who they could reach out to in the organisation for feedback, some volunteers expressed an interest in having more opportunities to connect with each other and the organisation. The befriending role is a one-to-one role and does not involve any interaction with other volunteers. It is suggested that the organisation provide opportunities for volunteers to get together at a local or regional level for gathering feedback and providing a sense of connection with the wider team of volunteers.

Most volunteers reported feeling well-informed regarding changes within the organisation and updates that would be relevant to their role. They reported hearing this via phone call, email, a monthly newsletter and quarterly update. One volunteer said, "If anything is happening the Coordinator gets in touch straight away". Another volunteer said, "I get emailed newsletters from ALONE from time to time and they are interesting and helpful". Another volunteer said, "The communication is very good".

INDICATOR 9

The whole organisation is aware of the need to give volunteers recognition.

All volunteers spoke about the excellent level of recognition provided by the organisation. One volunteer said, "The Volunteer Manager must meet hundreds of volunteers, but he always calls me by my name when we meet. I am amazed!" Volunteers appreciated the Christmas party and other events within their service area that were scheduled throughout the year. One volunteer said, "We are always recognised at things like National Volunteer Week". Another volunteer said, "They always say thank you in the newsletter and just by the fact they check up on you by phone to see how things are going, you feel valued". Another volunteer echoed, "I definitely feel thanked and respected as a volunteer". Another volunteer noted, "The Dementia Talk they organised was a really good way to be appreciated because they are trying to further your development as a person". Volunteers consistently noted that the workshops they attended were valuable and made them feel a part of the organisation.

Staff, the CEO and the board director all clearly communicated their appreciation of volunteers and recognition of the value of their contribution. They all spoke with genuine respect for volunteers. One staff member said, "They keep the organisation alive and they make it really easy and enjoyable to work with them. They are very engaged with ALONE and very happy to support us in promoting the organisation in

the media”. Another staff member said, “We are well connected to our local volunteer centre and invite all our volunteers to thank you events at the centre. We also always invite them to pop in to our office and they do”. The CEO confirmed, “The real recognition is in how we go about the work – always having someone from staff to support them and having good procedures in place. How we map, mirror and respond to the volunteer journey”. A volunteer said, “The way they stay in touch shows that we are valued and cared for”.

Volunteers are encouraged to give feedback to the organisation through check-in phone calls, the annual survey and through ad hoc focus groups regarding certain issues and projects such as the Strategic Plan. One volunteer said, “I was invited to attend a volunteer feedback session with twenty or so other volunteers and the CEO to get ideas from volunteers on the ground and it was really good and interesting”. A staff member said, “We do a volunteer survey every year and also there are volunteer befrienders on the board of management. Volunteers are always encouraged to come back to their Volunteer Support Officer or Support Coordinator with any issues”. Another volunteer said, “ALONE is very welcoming of feedback – they always say they are open to ideas and there are many meetings where they ask for volunteer input”. Another volunteer noted, “If I had an idea that I think would be great for the organisation I know they would welcome the feedback”. The Volunteer Manager and CEO confirmed that volunteers were consulted as part of the strategic planning process. The Volunteer Leadership Group will also provide an opportunity for volunteers to feedback to the organisation.

Volunteers consistently confirmed they had the opportunity to develop their skills both through training and through their experience of volunteering. One volunteer confirmed, “I am much more of a patient person and I guess it helps me look at the brighter side of life and appreciate everything I have and makes me want to help people more”. Another volunteer echoed, “Because I have interacted with quite a lot of older people through various events I feel I know more about growing older and the problems you encounter and have learned how you can help older people and lift them up”. Another volunteer said, “I learned so much and certainly have had a lot of new experiences and learned a lot about the services ALONE has to offer”. Another volunteer stated, “I have learned how to build a level of social connection and how to engage someone who might be hesitant to open up”. Another volunteer confirmed, “I have learned how to be more patient – and how to walk slowly!”.

The Volunteer Manager explained that a learning framework is currently being developed for staff and volunteers. ALONE has consulted with 60 volunteers so far to inform what kinds of skills they will focus on in the learning framework. Some topics that have been suggested include bereavement, dementia, mobility, and mental health.

All volunteers can avail of a reference when leaving the organisation. This was confirmed by the Volunteer Manager who noted, “there is a really good take up of the offer of a reference”.

Depending on the length of commitment and the volunteer role, volunteers are invited to a face-to-face exit interview. The Volunteer Manager confirmed, “We always send a thank you card and an evaluation form with a self-addressed stamped envelope. Volunteers do send them back along with their ID card”.



SUGGESTIONS FOR DEVELOPMENT

Summary of suggestions for development

2.2 While the Volunteer Support Officers and Support Coordinators with responsibility for volunteers have received in-house training by the Volunteer Manager it is suggested that they attend volunteer management training either with their local volunteer centre or with Volunteer Ireland.

3.5 While the current application form asks some information in relation to diversity it is suggested that more information (such as nationality, gender, disability) is gathered to ensure that all aspects of diversity are being monitored. A separate document should be created for this diversity monitoring.

8.2 It is suggested that the Volunteer Leadership Group programme be reviewed and adapted to suit both the volunteer's capacity and the organisation's needs.

8.4 It is suggested that the organisation provide opportunities for volunteers to get together at a local or regional level for gathering feedback and providing a sense of connection with the wider team of volunteers.

CONDITIONS (IF APPLICABLE)

Summary of how conditions were met:

OR

Summary of why organisation has not met the standard: