



FareShare Volunteering Programme

An evaluation of the FareShare volunteering programme

Executive Summary

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Background and introduction

FareShare fights hunger and its underlying causes by unlocking large volumes of high-quality surplus food from the food and drink industry and redistributing it to frontline charities and community groups, so that it can be turned into meals and fed to vulnerable people.

Through its network of 21 Regional Centres, FareShare redistributes surplus food to almost 11,000 local community groups and charities, which support nearly a million people every week. Around 1,300 dedicated volunteers are the driving force behind this operation.

As part of its plans to scale-up the redistribution of surplus food, FareShare secured funding from the Nesta Second Half Fund to grow its volunteer force, particularly targeting volunteers over the age of 50.

This report is an evaluation of the volunteering programme, the results of which will help FareShare to improve volunteer recruitment and retention.

People consulted and methods

The evaluation started with a Theory of Change workshop with staff and two volunteers to help understand the volunteer's journey. We then identified what metrics will be measured, when and how in order to evaluate performance.

The key evaluation methods were:

- An annual survey - which was completed by 397 volunteers (around a third of those volunteering at the time);
- Induction survey - which generated 143 responses;
- 8-week survey - 50 responses;
- Visits to four Regional Centres - including interviews with Volunteer Managers, a tour of the operation and focus groups/interviews with volunteers (21 participated).

Key findings



Recruitment activities: FareShare UK launched a national campaign to recruit more volunteers, whilst participating Regional Centres built partnerships and conducted local promotion to target people locally. This dual approach was successful, with 4,313 volunteers recruited by March 2019, exceeding the target of 2,750.

Time donated: Volunteers give a significant proportion of their time every week, an average of 10.64 hours, typically over two shifts. Volunteers responding to the annual survey had volunteered for an average of 2.13 years.

Older volunteers: Focusing recruitment activities at volunteers aged 50 and above is a good strategic decision as they have a wealth of experience and stay longer (volunteers aged 50+ had volunteered an average of 2.48 years, compared to 1.36 years for younger volunteers). Targeting older volunteers should continue after funding has ended.

Motivations for volunteering: More than half of new volunteers said that they wanted to make a difference to vulnerable people, which is also the biggest motivation for why people continue volunteering.

“Why do I volunteer? Just to make people’s lives better. End of story.”

Around half are motivated to volunteer to get work experience, tackle food waste and meet new people (volunteers could choose more than one reason).



Several volunteers said that they volunteer as part of their plan to improve their mental health or control an addiction. They said that they benefit from the structure that volunteering provides and doing something positive for their community.

“I wanted to volunteer as things didn’t go right for me. And this has become one of my safe places when I’m not in a good place myself.”

Other engagement with FareShare: Both new and existing volunteers had little engagement with FareShare outside of their volunteering. Better communications with FareShare were requested by several volunteers.

Demographics and diversity: Volunteers are typically male, from a predominantly white background. 61% are aged 50 and above. Some Regional Centres had taken steps to increase the ethnic diversity of volunteers, with good success. However, more needs to be done to recruit volunteers from black, Asian and minority ethnic backgrounds. Systems should be put in place to monitor progress towards diversity.



Disability and inclusion: 17% of volunteers have a disability or long-term health condition. Most of those we spoke to through this research were happy with their experience, but some concerns were raised by a small number of volunteers that people with learning disabilities need clearer Easy Read instructions and that better support should be available to meet the individual needs of volunteers with a disability or long-term health condition.

Volunteer satisfaction: The vast majority of volunteers were very positive about their experience - 99% would recommend FareShare as a place to volunteer. One volunteer described it as *“the best experience ever in my life”*.

Induction and training: The induction generally prepares volunteers well for their role. However, some volunteers started to feel less clear about their responsibilities once they had been doing the role for a few weeks and requested more *“regular and consistent warehouse training”* as well as opportunities to learn from more experienced colleagues.

Several volunteers highlighted inconsistencies in the way that processes are taught by staff and other volunteers. Clearer written instructions were requested; more support is needed to guide volunteers in their first few months, which is likely to increase volunteer retention.

Feeling valued: 85% of volunteers feel ‘extremely’ or ‘very’ valued in their role. Volunteer recognition efforts developed by FareShare had been well received. 93% have a high understanding of the difference they are making to hunger and food waste.

“I have never worked with such friendly helpful people who are at the Deptford warehouse, which makes my volunteering experience so enjoyable.”

Some volunteers requested more opportunities to engage with and learn about the people and groups benefiting from redistributed food.



Balancing people and process: Staff and volunteers acknowledged that FareShare's operations had grown significantly in the last three years, which has placed pressures on warehouse staff to distribute increasingly large volumes of food to a growing number of groups. Some volunteers suggested that warehouse staff weren't always equipped with the right people skills to manage and support volunteers, which has resulted in a small proportion of volunteers feeling undervalued.

"A lot of Warehouse staff come from a warehouse-management background... It's about being able to work with and relate to volunteers. Getting that balance is the tricky thing. I think some recent members of staff have struggled with that."

Adjustments need to be made to ensure that volunteers are supported; better training should be provided to warehouse staff on working with volunteers. In some Regional Centres improvements to warehouse facilities and equipment were requested.

Benefits to volunteers: There is good evidence that volunteering for FareShare has given volunteers new skills and confidence, which helps to increase their employability. 84% of those who are volunteering to improve their work prospects thought that volunteering for FareShare would lead to paid employment. Centres that run employment programmes have a very good success rate at helping people get the skills and qualifications they need to enter (or re-enter) the employment market.

"I have now gained employment - picking in a warehouse. I have had a good introduction to warehousing through working at FareShare."

There is also good evidence that volunteering increases volunteers' physical and mental wellbeing. A large proportion of volunteers said that they feel fitter, happier and have made new friends and social connections.

"I'm happier and healthier; I was previously sick. Volunteering has helped me get better. It's good for your self-esteem."

Volunteering for FareShare has also led to people gaining new perspectives on life and a sense of purpose.

"I love it here. I get a feelgood factor from volunteering and a self-satisfaction from doing something positive for society."

Conclusions

There is clear evidence that funding from the Nesta Second Half Fund, and the subsequent growth in volunteer numbers, has supported a 29% increase in food distributed by FareShare in the last year, with demand expected to grow further. Annually and across its food distribution services, FareShare is providing over 46.5 million meals to vulnerable people from food that would otherwise have gone into landfill.

Volunteering for FareShare therefore achieves two important social benefits - good food is not wasted, and instead is redistributed to charities to feed vulnerable people, whilst the operation of redistributing food brings a multitude of benefits to volunteers themselves.

As FareShare's success continues and demand grows at a rapid pace, more volunteers than ever are needed to stop good food going to waste and to help feed vulnerable people; they need the right support from FareShare to keep 'the feelgood factor'.

