

# **Fears that cost of living crisis will hit volunteer numbers**

**Volunteers manning vital front-line services are witnessing their health and well-being put at risk as they struggle to provide help amid the cost of living crisis, it has been warned.**

Volunteers provide everything from access to food, hospital transport and practical help to the aged and vulnerable. They are often the vital sympathetic ear for troubles.

But as West Lothian's Third Sector celebrated its hundreds of supporters during Volunteer Week it was warned that the cost of living crisis could threaten the pool of willing support coming forward.

Studies have also shown what was long thought; that the young and unemployed were among those suffering the worst in the crisis.

Research from Volunteer Scotland points to concerns that the cost of living crisis will impact volunteering activity in the future.

Alan McCloskey, CEO Voluntary Sector Gateway West Lothian (VSGWL) acknowledged the concerns but commented: "It is fitting that in Volunteers Week, the positive impact of formal and informal volunteering is celebrated and recognised.

“Volunteers play an highly important role in the fabric of civic society and it can be extremely rewarding for individuals to know that they are playing a part in supporting those in need across local communities in West Lothian.”

Volunteer Scotland’s report highlighted key areas of concern.

The report outlined: “The crisis is not affecting people equally – younger adults, social grades D and E, and the grouping of ‘students, the unemployed, those not working,’ are being disproportionately affected.

“Volunteers’ own health and wellbeing is at risk – volunteers’ health and well-being may be even more susceptible, especially if they are undertaking demanding volunteer roles, and juggling their volunteering contribution with work and caring responsibilities.

“Recovery from Covid has been compromised, the cost of living crisis has extended the problems experienced during Covid.

“Increased demand for services driven by societal needs, the increase in demand for core services and activities experienced by two thirds of TSOs is likely to increase the demand for volunteers.”

Councillor Kirsteen Sullivan, the depute leader of West Lothian Council, said: “I’ve been incredibly lucky to meet hundreds of local volunteers throughout my time as a councillor. In the past few months I have met litter pickers, sports coaches, befrienders, community councillors and activity organisers for older people amongst others.

“So many people don’t recognise themselves as volunteers but that’s exactly what they are when they give hours of their time every week to support individuals, groups and communities, without any expectation of thanks. So I would like to extend my personal thanks to the efforts of all volunteers who contribute so much to daily life here in West

Lothian.

"I'd also like to thank the West Lothian Volunteer Network and the Voluntary Sector Gateway West Lothian who work tirelessly to promote volunteering and shine a light on the sterling efforts of volunteers in West Lothian."

The VSG's annual report said: "The important contribution of volunteers was particularly apparent during the early stages of the Covid-19 pandemic when 64% of Scotland's adult population gave their time.

"Volunteer-led services often focus on preventative and community-based interventions, helping to reduce the burden on our statutory health and social care services. The contribution of volunteers has also been vital in the response to the current cost of living crisis, with people in West Lothian and across Scotland giving their time to support access to food, warm spaces and essential advice for those who need it."

by Stuart Somerville *Local Democracy Reporter*.

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