



THE SCOTTISH WOMEN'S CONVENTION

A BLETHER ON...

Volunteering



June 2025

Volunteers' Week

From the 2nd to the 8th of June, Scotland celebrates the important contributions of volunteers through Volunteers' Week. Across Scotland, 46% of adults have volunteered in some capacity, with women volunteering at a higher rate than men year on year¹. As such, the SWC carried out an online Bletter to understand women's experiences of volunteering in Scotland, while also celebrating the contributions of SWC Volunteers.

Discussions focused on multiple key themes: the **advantages of volunteering**, **barriers to volunteering**, and **women's unpaid work**. This report provides a summary of each theme, as well as key recommendations which we believe align with the wants of women.

Key Recommendations

- **Provide improved, practical volunteering opportunities to give young women employable skills.**
- **Supply free travel for women who volunteer.**
- **Monitor the third sector to ensure effective wellbeing support is delivered for volunteers.**
- **Educate young people on the disadvantages women face to tackle engrained prejudice.**

The Scottish Women's Convention (SWC)

The SWC is funded to engage with women across Scotland to ensure that their views are represented in policy and decision-making processes. The SWC uses the views of women to respond to a variety of parliamentary, governmental, and organisational consultation papers at Scottish, UK, and international levels.

The SWC gathers information using different methods, including roadshows, thematic conferences, surveys, and both in-person and online roundtable events. This submission presents the views of a range of women, reflecting their opinions, ideas and lived experience. Working together with many other equalities organisations and community groups, we use our broad network to ensure that women from a range of backgrounds are heard and acknowledged. We are continually reviewing innovative ways of engaging with women and developing our trauma-informed and culturally sensitive practice to support vital contributions from as many women as possible.

¹ Volunteer Scotland. (2022). National Volunteering Profile. Available at: <https://www.volunteerscotland.net/research-evaluation/national-volunteering-profile>

Women's Views

Advantages of Volunteering

“[Volunteering] is about taking the weight off people’s shoulders and seeing them smile.”

We asked women to tell us of benefits they had gained from carrying out voluntary work. They explained that volunteering provides a sense of purpose and can be incredibly rewarding – particularly for those delivering direct support to the community. Additionally, women in attendance stated that they had gained new friends through the volunteering. While volunteering maintained good levels of mental wellbeing, women also explained that they had been provided with unique opportunities, developing their professional skillset. This was viewed as particularly valuable for young women, with it being suggested that through volunteering young people could be provided with employable, practical skills.

- “...volunteering has allowed me to learn more about myself and make new friends...In terms of professional development, it’s allowed me to develop skills that I’ll need in a job, particularly because of the competitive nature of the job market now.”
- “Skill up the young folk, let’s offer them skills and trades”
- “Opportunities to shadow staff allowed me to build confidence and learn through observation.”

Barriers to Volunteering

“The five years I was on job seekers...I had my bus pass, I worked in the foodbank, without those things, I would have been really struggling. I couldn’t afford my transport, food”

Women also highlighted barriers to participation, providing multiple examples whereby they had struggled to access volunteering opportunities. The issue of financial barriers arose, with some stating that the extra costs of volunteering, such as travel, had limited their ability to commit time to charity work. When this was combined with the additional responsibilities and time associated with volunteering, women struggled to maintain their voluntary positions. Despite this, some women had committed significant hours of unpaid labour to third sector organisations. While they emphasised that this work was optional, the lack of effective support and/or recognition within some organisations actively eroded women’s mental and physical health. When asked what needed to change to improve this situation, women in attendance suggested free travel for volunteers and better support from organisations.

- “...the lack of support, and people not asking you if you’re okay. In one place I was doing 50 hours a week [unpaid]”
- “Women might be motivated to volunteer if travel costs were automatically paid and if voluntary work tasks had flexible hours to fit in with school times”

Women's Unpaid Work

"I mean, I've always worked, but women are undervalued full stop...Volunteering is work and the system should recognise that."

Throughout discussions, the wider issue of women's unpaid work arose. Women in attendance were generally positive about their volunteering experiences, yet, as stated some felt that they had been "taken for granted". This was viewed as a wider issue facing society, with women's unpaid labour remaining unrecognised and unrewarded. It has been estimated that within the UK, women provide approximately 23.2 billion hours of unpaid childcare per year, compared to 9.7 billion carried out by men². If this definition of unpaid work was expanded to consider women's additional responsibilities, such as cleaning, cooking, and volunteering, this figure would certainly increase. To counter this issue, women called for increased recognition of women's invaluable role through improved education. Women proposed that by teaching young people about the disadvantages faced by women, from a young age, positive solutions could be found.

- "There was a video I saw, and there was a woman who was unemployed, she had lost her job...but actually she was doing about 40 hours a week at the community centre...she got loads of satisfaction out of that, but it isn't recognised."
- "...I think that [volunteers] are valued, but more so by women, and less so by men. There's a guy in my Higher Physics class, and we've had conversations about why we make space for women...that lack of understanding of women's disadvantage contributes to the continued devaluing of women"



² Centre for Progressive Policy. (2022). CPPs Latest Report Finds Caring Responsibilities are Disproportionately Impacting Women in the UK. Available at: <https://www.progressive-policy.net/publications/press-release-cpps-latest-report-finds-caring-responsibilities-are-disproportionately-impacting-women-in-the-uk>

A Celebration of SWC Volunteers!

The SWC has a Volunteer Network of 20 volunteers and we are incredibly grateful for their contributions. SWC Volunteers assist across events, including Conferences, Roadshows, and our International Women's Day celebration, providing invaluable support to the SWC Team and women in attendance.

Women who attend SWC events, regularly highlight the friendly atmosphere established by volunteers – stressing how important this is in enabling positive conversations. We also strongly believe in creating safe spaces for all women and the hard work of our volunteers significantly contributes to this.



“Thanks to volunteers; great welcome and friendly support yet again” – Conference Attendee



“Warm welcome; made to feel included and valued by volunteers” – Conference Attendee

We are also heartened to note that SWC Volunteers have reported a range of benefits through their volunteering with the SWC. They stated that they have gained confidence, through the support provided by Board and Staff. Women have also acquired new friends, built relationships, and expanded their knowledge on a variety of issues.

“I felt a little shy at first but feel very comfortable now. The SWC are all amazing, kind and warm, which helps me a lot in my role.” – SWC Volunteer

“I feel very appreciated by the SWC, and it's absolutely a poster girl for how to support volunteers; it's giving a wee bit extra.” – SWC Volunteer

Interested in joining our Volunteer Network?

Please contact info@scottishwomensconvention.org to find out more.

“I love how the SWC brings women together and makes us feel empowered.” – SWC Volunteer

“It's great to be working together with such inspirational and dynamic women.” – SWC Volunteer

Thank You!

Thank you to the women who shared their experiences with us and a huge thank you to our Volunteer Network for their invaluable support. We will continue to advocate for women across Scotland so that their views are included in the policy-making process.



SWC CONTACT DETAILS

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