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An exploration of Long-term Retention of Volunteers in Foróige, a National Youth Work Organisation

Dawn O'Higgins

CARL Research Project



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Executive summary

Background to Study

This study has taken place as part of Science Shop in UCC. As can be seen above Science shop is participatory in nature and involves a CSO and researcher from UCC coming together to form a piece of research that will benefit the CSO. Foróige is a National Youth Organisation who approached UCC about a piece of research in relation to volunteering. Foróige found it was Garda vetting 1500 volunteers a year, yet volunteer numbers were only increasing by half this amount. From this it appeared that a significant number of existing volunteers were giving up their volunteer role throughout the year. From this it was decided to study what keeps volunteers involved with the Organisation over a long period of time.

Aims and Objectives

The aim of this research is to explore what keeps volunteers committed to the work they do with Foróige over a long period of time. The research is designed to gather information, thoughts and ideas from volunteers who have been involved with Foróige for longer than three years.

The objectives of the research include; identifying motivations for volunteers involvement with Foróige, exploring what keeps volunteers committed to their volunteering role in the long-term and highlighting factors that may support volunteer retention within Foróige. In achieving these objectives it is hoped that the information gathered will assist Foróige and other volunteer-led organisations in understanding what motivates people to volunteer, how this affects their continued involvement in Foróige, and what, if anything could be done to further retain volunteers over a longer period of time.

Methodology

A literature review was conducted and qualitative methods were used, within an interpretivist perspective, to collect data in relation to volunteers. Volunteers, who had been involved in Foróige in the long term, were interviewed in relation to their thoughts, feelings and perceptions about sustained volunteering in the Organisation. Semi structured interviews were used due to the exploratory nature of the subject. Information collected was then

analysed and a number of significant findings emerged. The findings were analysed in relation to themes that emerged from both the literature review and the data collected.

Results

From the findings it is clear that Foróige is doing a substantial amount to encourage volunteer retention. There were a number of key findings in relation to what encourages sustained volunteering. There were also a number of findings in relation to what more could be done to foster further volunteer retention. There was an overwhelming consensus that training, development and support are the most important retention factors, along with volunteers feeling valued and appreciated. From the outset this author believed that motivation to volunteer played a significant role in people's intention to remain volunteers. It is clear from the literature and data collected that this is not necessarily the case. Although intrinsic motivation to volunteer does appear to be a protective factor for volunteer retention, the more significant retentive factor would appear to be the management of volunteers within an organisation. From this research it would appear that the most prominent aspects of management related to sustained volunteering are; training, support and recognition.

Recommendations

The recommendations made by the researcher are based on the views of participants and findings from the interviews. The recommendations suggest a number of different ideas to further develop volunteer retention within the organisation; these recommendations are in relation to the themes of training support and recognition. It has been recommended that Foróige strongly encourage volunteers to engage in training at all levels and that the benefits of training for both the organisation and the volunteer be emphasised. In addition it is recommended that experienced volunteers participate in the facilitation of training as these volunteers will be able to inform less experienced volunteers about the reality of the volunteer experience. It is recommended that a formal system of support, if not already in place, be put in place and volunteers should regularly be told how to access support should they need it. The final recommendation is in relation to creating a formal structure for recognising the good work of volunteers.

Implications of Findings

These findings have positive implications for Foróige and other volunteer-led organisations. Volunteer retention has little to do with initial motivation and a significant amount to do with management of volunteers. Adapting policies and practices to reflect this will encourage volunteer retention. The withdrawal and continuation factors evident throughout the research give organisations a model to work from when working to build on volunteer retention.

Authors Conclusions

Volunteer-led organisations are an important part of Irish society. Retaining volunteers in these organisations is imperative to the work they do. As can be seen from the research there are a number of factors which positively and negatively affect volunteer retention. Working to alleviate withdrawal factors will benefit not only service users but the wider community. Focusing on certain areas of volunteer management within organisations, namely training support and recognition, is the best way to approach improving volunteer retention.

Abstract

This research explores long-term volunteer retention in Foróige; a national youth work organisation. Foróige have found that their volunteer numbers are not increasing inline with the number of people they are Garda Vetting, this would appear to mean there is a drop off of existing volunteers. Foróige and the researcher wanted to understand what motivates people to volunteer and what keeps them committed to volunteering in the long-term. A literature review was conducted and qualitative methods were used, within an interpretivist perspective, to collect data in relation to volunteers. Volunteers, who had been involved in Foróige in the long term, were interviewed in relation to their thoughts, feelings and perceptions about sustained volunteering in the Organisation. This information was then analysed and a number of significant findings emerged. The findings of the study show that training, support, praise and recognition are key factors in volunteer retention. Using the literature review and these findings a number of recommendations were made in relation to supporting continued volunteering within Foróige.

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Chapter One Introduction

1.1 Introduction

This chapter will introduce the research topic by explaining the purpose and background of the study. Background information about Foróige and volunteering in Ireland will be presented, as will a discussion around the rationale for this research. The chapter will go on further to outline research aims and objectives, research questions and limitations of the study.

The research dissertation is the final piece of work undertaken as part of the Masters in Social Work. Students have the opportunity to research a topic or idea that is of interest to them. Alternatively students have the opportunity to take part in a Science Shop Project. Civil Society Organisations (hereafter referred to as CSO), approach University College Cork with pieces of research that would be beneficial to their organisation. This offers students the opportunity to take part in participatory research that will be of benefit to service users and the community. This piece of research is part of the Science Shop initiative on behalf of the CSO Foróige.

1.2 Background to the Research

Foróige is an Irish youth organisation whose mission is *“to enable young people to involve themselves consciously and actively in their own development and in the development of society”* (Foróige, 2010). There are up to 57,000 young people involved with Foróige each year, and this is facilitated by staff, but also by 5,125 volunteers (Foróige, 2011). Without these volunteers it would be impossible for Foróige to continue the work it does in communities around Ireland. Foróige has found that it is Garda vetting approximately 1500 potential volunteers a year, but their volunteer numbers are increasing by less than half of this. This would appear to indicate that there are many people giving up their volunteering role with Foróige each year.

Research by Volunteer Centres Ireland (VCI) has shown that the number of people volunteering has risen throughout the economic downturn. According to the VCI, there was a 100% increase in people registering to volunteer in the first three months of 2010, compared to the same period in 2008. (Volunteer Centres Ireland, 2010). However, Foróige is finding that their numbers are not increasing to this extent. In response to this, and discussions with Foróige, it was decided to focus this piece of research on exploring the area of long term retention of volunteers.

Haski-Leventhal and Bargal state that *“volunteers are the backbone of civil society and voluntary organisations”* (2008, pg. 68). Volunteer Centres Ireland defines volunteering as:

The commitment of time and energy, for the benefit of society, local communities, individuals outside the immediate family, the environment or other causes. Voluntary activities are undertaken of a person's own free will, without payment, except for the reimbursement of out-of-pocket expenses (Volunteering Ireland, 2011).

Powell and Guerin also talk about voluntarism as involving groups of individuals who “*freely associate without a commercial motive to further their own welfare or the welfare of others*” (1997, pg. 91).

Clary and Snyder (1999) pose two fundamental questions which are raised by volunteering; why do people engage in volunteering in the first place, and once they are involved, what keeps them committed to volunteering in the long-term? This leads to a discussion regarding one of the most important issues facing volunteer-led organisations, and that is the high turnover of volunteers. It is these issues that this research hopes to address in putting forward potential answers to these two fundamental questions.

For the purpose of this study, *long term volunteer* refers to volunteers who have been engaged in a volunteering position with Foróige for more than three years.

1.3 Research Rationale

Sheer (2008, pg. 64) states “*social work owes its existence to volunteerism*”. He further goes on to discuss how volunteers preceded social workers in many fields of practice and also speaks about the long tradition of volunteerism in social welfare. During the 19th and early 20th centuries social work in Ireland was carried out on a voluntary basis. The first distinct signs of social work as an occupation of its own can be seen in the early 20th century (Skehill, 1999). Specific social work education and training emerged in the early 20th century. However, there was still little distinction between the professional social worker and the “*untrained volunteer charity worker*” (Skehill, 1999, pg. 27). It would appear that social work has its foundations in the Charitable Organisation Society (COS). It was from here that formal support for groups, such as the elderly, children and people with disabilities was found. It was the COS who attempted to make the provision of services more systematic and efficient (Sheer, 2008). The COS introduced a scheme for training its workers, as they could see from experience that “*the study of social problems was seen... as a serious undertaking and an essential prerequisite to entering the field*” (Kearney, 2005, pg. 16). It was from this that a need for training for people engaged in social work came to light. It is with the emergence of definitive social work education that the shift from volunteer social service provider to social worker emerged.

With education, there came a clear divide between social work practice and volunteer social service. However, the relationship between social worker and volunteer has remained strong. Many of the values evident in the work of the COS can clearly be seen to tie in with the values

evident in social work practice today. These include; each case to be treated individually, full enquiry to be made into the causes of distress and the assistance of kinship and neighbourhood networks to be elicited. Thus indicating that social work did not completely distance itself from its ties with volunteers, Cnaan and Casacio (1999) clearly emphasise the relationship between social workers and volunteers merely shifted into one in which social workers develop and deliver systematic services, while volunteers provide a hidden safety net.

It is clear that volunteering still plays a vital role in the provision of social services. Throughout both the researchers practice placements, links with volunteer organisations were clearly evident. Service users were referred to organisations such as the St. Vincent de Paul, Women's Aid, Focus Ireland and Le Chéile, among others. Each of these organisations utilises volunteers in its everyday provision of services. In a time of under resourcing and large case loads, social workers have come to rely on volunteer services to further support clients. These voluntary services are a key resource for both social workers and service users. Fledgling volunteer numbers in these key services could be seen to have a detrimental effect on the provision of service, and this could be seen to have a knock on effect on the caseload of already under resourced social workers and social work departments. O'Neill (2002) (cited in Sheer 2008, pg.66) sums it up as *"the idea is that if properly trained and supervised, volunteers can fill in and allow professional social workers to focus on the more complex aspects of practice"*.

1.4 Research Aims and Objectives

The aim of this research is to explore what keeps volunteers committed to the work they do with Foróige over a long period of time. It is hoped that this research may then inform efforts of Foróige to retain volunteers in the future. The research is designed to gather information, thoughts and ideas from volunteers who have been involved with Foróige for longer than three years.

The objectives of the research are to:

- Identify motivations for people's involvement in volunteering and with Foróige
- Find out what has kept, and continues to keep volunteers involved over long periods of time
- Highlight factors that may aid volunteer retention for Foróige in the future

In achieving these objectives it is hoped that the information gathered will assist Foróige and other volunteer-led organisations in understanding what motivates people to volunteer, how this affects their continued involvement in Foróige, and what, if anything could be done to further retain volunteers over a longer period of time.

1.5 Research Questions

1. What are people's motivations to volunteer and what keeps people committed to volunteering?
2. How can volunteer organisations retain volunteers in the long term?
3. What can be learned about the nature of volunteerism in Irish Society?

1.6 Limitations

A number of specific limitations can be seen in relation to this study. The first limitation is the small scale nature of this research. Due to word count constraints, there was limited scope in which to explore the area of volunteer retention and the themes that emerged from the literature review and data collected.

A further limitation pertains to the fact that although Foróige is a national organisation, this specific piece of research was based in Cork and the participants were all involved in Cork based branches of Foróige. Although it is possible to somewhat generalise the findings, they are not representative on a national scale.

A final limitation that could be evident within this research is bias. Foróige sourced the participants for the research and are aware of what volunteers took part. All participants were aware that the final research would be presented to Foróige and this may have caused some participants to be less honest about Foróige for fear of their observations being identifiable.

Furthermore each of the participants is heavily involved in Foróige and this may have encouraged them to talk about Foróige in a positive light.

1.7 Chapter Summaries

The contents of the chapters are as follows;

- Chapter Two is the literature review and this examines the area of volunteering and volunteer retention by looking at research and concepts that have emerged about the topic over time.
- Chapter Three is the methodology chapter and this looks at the research methods used to obtain research data and findings.
- Chapter Four evaluates and discusses the findings of the research.

- Chapter Five summarises key findings from the discussion and looks at recommendations for the future of volunteering, volunteer retention and opportunities for further research.

1.8 Conclusion

This piece of research looks at sustained volunteering and how this is affected positively and negatively within Foróige. It also looks at the positive effect volunteer retention can have for social work practice. Although Foróige has seen the number of people applying to become volunteers rise, this has not been evident on the ground. One explanation for this appears to be the loss of existing volunteers throughout the year. It is from this that it was decided to investigate volunteer retention and the reasons behind existing volunteers' long term commitment. From this the research will go on to investigate what could be done to encourage volunteers to remain involved over a longer period of time.

The next chapter will introduce and evaluate relevant literature in the area of volunteering and volunteer retention.

Chapter Two Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

The aim of this chapter is to examine and review existing literature in relation to volunteering and volunteer retention. The chapter will look at why people volunteer initially and what are the factors that keep people committed to volunteering. The correlation between these volunteer motivation factors and retention factors will also be explored.

2.2 Volunteering

In 2008 the Report from the Taskforce on Active Citizenship made a number of recommendations in relation to active citizenship and volunteering. One of the main recommendations stated that individuals should be recommended:

...to spend at least one percent of their time doing some form of community service or activity outside the home that they enjoy. This means just under two hours a week volunteering, coaching, organising or giving a helping hand somewhere (2008, pg. 11).

Clary and Snyder (1999) used a functional approach to consider volunteerism. The functional approach examines what initiates peoples desire to volunteer, how they are directed into a volunteering role, and more importantly what sustains them in this volunteering role. Although some volunteers may engage in volunteering for similar reasons, there are different motives behind these reasons. A further reason for using the functional approach to volunteering, is that the functional approach suggests:

...important psychological events, such as embarking on a course of volunteer activities and then maintaining those activities over extended periods of time, depend on matching the motivational concerns of individuals with situations that can satisfy those concerns (Clary and Snyder, 1999, pg 156).

For the purposes of this research, a long term volunteer is defined as someone who has been engaged in their volunteering role within one particular organisation for three years or more. This definition came from literature and discussions with Foróige.

Throughout the literature volunteer retention is referred to in a number of different ways including; 'sustained volunteering', 'continued volunteering' and 'volunteer continuation'. These terms will be used interchangeably throughout this literature review and throughout this dissertation.

2.3 Volunteer Motivations

Studying what motivates people to volunteer is important as knowing why people volunteer can enhance the recruitment and retention of volunteers. Esmond and Dunlop *explain "what actually motivates a person to volunteer is a complex and vexing question, yet understanding these motivations can be of great assistance to organisations in attracting, placing and*

retaining volunteers” (2004, pg. 6). Clary and Snyder (1999) explored the role of motivation in volunteering. They particularly looked at decisions about becoming a volunteer and decisions about continuing as a volunteer.

Clary et al (1998) identified six personal and social functions served by volunteering. These functions are: values, understanding, enhancement, career, social and protective functions. This built on the work of Omoto and Snyder (1993) that looked at the personalities and motivations of HIV and AIDS volunteers. Each of these functions serves a different purpose and can be seen as creating a different motive for people to volunteer. Clary and Snyder (1999) looked at values in terms of giving the volunteer the opportunity to express or act upon important values. Understanding was described as a volunteers desire to learn more about the world and use skills that they do not often have the opportunity to use. Enhancement refers to a volunteer developing psychologically through the volunteering experience. Volunteers who had career related motivations used volunteering for experience in a chosen profession or for career advancement. The social function of volunteering enables volunteers to make new friends and create new social networks. Finally, the protective functions of volunteering looks at the volunteer using the volunteering role to address personal problems and ease negative feelings, such as guilt. Powell and Guerin (1997) discuss a number of moral principles which imply a duty to give to others, these include; indebtedness – one person owing something to another, reparation – one person has to compensate another for harm done and duties owed, within families or according to status. These principles appear to reflect the protective functions of volunteering discussed by Clary and Snyder (1999) and Clary et al. (1998).

A Volunteer Motivation Inventory (VMI) was created in Western Australia to assess the motivational drives of volunteers in the region. Through this inventory, Esmond and Dunlop (2004) built on the work of Clary and Snyder (1999) and identified ten key motivators for volunteers, these included the six motivators discussed above and four motivators that had not previously been explored; reciprocity (volunteers believed that by doing good work, they would in turn be rewarded by good things happening for them), recognition (an individual volunteers in order to seek validation for their good work), self esteem (volunteering to increase own feelings of self worth) and reactivity (volunteering as a way to solve or cope with personal issues or problems). It was further discussed that these motivational factors could also be protective factors with regard to retaining volunteers.

It is clear that there are many different motivations behind volunteerism. However, the motivations mentioned all overlap in a number of ways, and it can be seen that there may not be one particular motivation for people to volunteer, but many different motivations. Some of these motivations can be seen as protective factors for sustained volunteering, however

Kovacs and Black clearly warn that *“factors that influence individuals to volunteer in the first place are not that same factors that influence them to continue to volunteer”* (1999, pg. 30).

2.4 Altruism versus Egoism

The debate about altruistic motivations and egotistic motivations for volunteering is evident in much of the volunteering research. The altruism/egoism debate involves two opposing arguments in relation to peoples motivations to volunteer. One side of the argument is that no voluntary act is truly selfless, all acts come with the hope of personal gain. The other side of this, is the argument that helpfulness is sometimes based on selfless concern for another. Volunteers talk about many different motivations for volunteering; these include both altruistic and self serving motivations. In general, these motivations are discussed side by side.

Dolnicar and Randle (2007) identify significant research which suggests that although some form of altruism is commonly found in many volunteer actions, there are implicit egotistic factors with the benefits they receive from being involved in the volunteering role. Dolnicar and Randle (2007) go on to acknowledge the fact that the majority of studies support the notion that motivations for volunteering are multi-faceted, they occur in combination with each other rather than in isolation. This supports Clary and Snyder’s (1999) findings in relation to the Volunteer Functions Inventory (VFI). The VFI pointed out the multi-motivational nature of volunteering. The finding that volunteers have multiple motivations adds to the altruism/egoism debate.

Meier and Stutzer (2004) discuss the altruism/egoism debate in terms of intrinsic and extrinsic motivations to volunteer. The first relates to people who volunteer because they enjoy helping others. This increases their well being; this reward is internally due to an intrinsic motivation to care for others. This could also be seen as altruistic motivation. The second relates to people who volunteer in order to see a by-product of this volunteer work. These people may not enjoy volunteering, but volunteer for a purpose such as career advancement or to increase their social standing. This is an extrinsic motivation for volunteering which can also be seen as egotistic motivation. A question arising from this is whether the people who are intrinsically or altruistically motivated to volunteer are more likely to continue volunteering for an extended period of time?

The question of whether altruism or egoism are more closely linked to longer service has yet to be answered by research. However Alexander’s (2000) study in relation to the retention of Special Constables in the UK, found that those who volunteered with the Special Constable Service for altruistic reasons gave a greater length of service than those who joined for reasons of personal gain or personal development.

Clary and Snyder (1999) came to the conclusion that many volunteers' motivations cannot be explicitly categorised into altruistic or egotistic motivations. Motivations are multifaceted and both altruism and egoism can play a part in a volunteer's motivation to engage in voluntarism.

2.5 What are the factors affecting volunteer retention?

Locke, Ellis and Davis Smith, (2003) discuss that continued volunteering is encouraged by management that is explicit, developmental, supportive and appreciative; by congruence between organisational and individual objectives and by social support such as friendship and a sense of responsibility.

Research tells us that there are primary and secondary factors for determining whether people withdraw from or continue to volunteer. The primary factors include personal and life events, and domestic stability, while secondary factors can be seen as being related to organisational practices. Alexander (2000) in his study of Special Constables in the UK found that volunteers who were already married at the time of joining were more likely to continue volunteering in the longer term. It was also found that volunteers with children at their time of joining were less likely to leave and more likely to complete a longer period of volunteering; *“Individuals who are already ‘settled’ in their personal lives and thus have fewer ‘life choices’ still to make are more likely to give a greater length of service...”* (Alexander, 2000, pg. 26). It can be seen from this that a stable personal life is a protective factor for long-term volunteering. Other primary protective factors can include higher levels of educational attainment and previous volunteering experience.

Carmen Hidalgo and Moreno (2009) discuss five variables that are seen to affect volunteer retention. These variables include: social networks, training, social support inside Foróige, characteristics of the job, and understanding. These variables support previous research by Locke, Ellis and Davis Smith (2003) and Alexander (2000). With variables from each of these pieces of research, it can be seen that there are a number of common withdrawal and continuation factors associated with Foróige in which the individual is volunteering. Table 2.1 has been constructed by the researcher to clearly show common withdrawal and continuation factors evident throughout the literature:

Table 2.1 Withdrawal and Continuation Factors

<i>Withdrawal Factors</i>	<i>Continuation Factors</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Poor supervision 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Social support and ties with other volunteers
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of relevant training 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sense of responsibility
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Feeling undervalued 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Congruence between organisation and personal intentions
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Uninteresting duties 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Space for personal autonomy
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Feeling volunteers are not deployed in a worthwhile manner 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Feeling valued and appreciated
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Loss of communication between volunteers and staff members 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Frequent supervision
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Adequate preparation and training

This model of continuation and withdrawal factors gives a clear example of the most prominent factors pertaining to volunteer retention.

Locke, Ellis and Davis Smith (2003) did however stress that continuation factors are not necessarily just the opposite of withdrawal factors. A number of these factors will be discussed in greater detail below.

2.5.1 Supervision and training

Haski-Leventhal and Bargal (2008), in research related to Israeli street work volunteers, talked about volunteers experiencing shock and surprise when they enter the field for the first time. The volunteers commented on contradictions between their expectations of the work and what they were faced with in reality. It was found that the same volunteers were given brief induction training in the minutes before they began work, learned about the job through 'on the job' training, and in many ways were left to learn their role themselves. Haski-Leventhal and Bargal also discussed the fact that while volunteering plays a small part in peoples lives, being so involved in service users "*severe troubles and life crises, intense emotional experiences, and a lack of training and knowledge can cause volunteers to burn out*" (2008, pg. 89). In this case, it could be seen that regular supervision from a trained staff member may have given the volunteers a safe environment to express these emotions and

discuss ways of dealing with them, which may prevent volunteer burnout and the subsequent withdrawal of volunteer services.

Carmen Hidalgo and Moreno (2009) also commented that intention to remain a volunteer was significantly increased with social support from organisation staff to their volunteers:

It seems that social support acts as reinforcement because the perception of performance by volunteers and, consequently, their intention to remain in the organization increase when volunteers feel they are supervised” (2009, pg. 596).

Oliviere et al. (1998) looked at volunteers in a palliative care setting, and the importance of training and support, for their development as volunteers and for their sustained involvement. This form of training covers many areas including what it was deemed the volunteer was most concerned about, such as knowing what to say to the client and knowing what practices might be seen as unhelpful. Oliviere (1998) acknowledged that volunteers can be in a vulnerable position when working with particular client groups and emphasised the importance of ongoing support and supervision.

In the Carmen Hidalgo and Moreno's (2009) study, volunteers positively evaluated training and social support from Foróige. This confirmed the findings of other studies, which linked the supervision of volunteers by Foróige on satisfaction and the maintenance of service.

2.5.2 Volunteers feelings of being valued and appreciated

The Task Force on Active Citizenship (2008) gave organisations a number of issues for consideration, these included:

...the extent to which new people can be encouraged to be involved and responsible in organisations – are they encouraged, trained, recognised? Are volunteers effectively thanked and recognised in our organisations? (2008, pg. 11).

The importance of valuing and recognising the contribution of volunteers in organisations is emphasised by the Taskforce. Encouragement, training and recognition can be seen as positive factors in sustained volunteering.

2.5.3 Value placed on the work undertaken by volunteers.

Carmen Hidalgo and Moreno (2009) looked at the role of the characteristics of the job of the volunteer. The nature of the job or activity the volunteer is involved in can be seen as the main predictor of a volunteers continued satisfaction and commitment. Their study found that the possibility of developing an interesting job with some autonomy has a positive effect on volunteer work. They found that the tasks of volunteers that had better defined objectives and tasks that were less repetitive, more significant and more useful for others were significant retention factors. Alexander (2000) also noted that space for personal autonomy and a sense

of responsibility in the work they do, were also protective factors for volunteering in the long term. This was supported by Carmen Hidalgo and Moreno's (2009) work which found that volunteers who lasted longer, were those who generally chose their task and had a higher perception of autonomy, and yet a sense of co operation with others. Alexander (2000) found that Special Constables who felt they were being deployed and utilised in a worthwhile manner, were more likely to volunteer over longer periods of time.

2.5.4 Congruence between organisation and personal intentions

In Locke, Ellis and Davis Smith (2003), the importance of congruence between the goals of Foróige and the goals of the individual was stressed. This in turn stresses the importance of matching volunteers to organisations. It can be seen that a loss of confidence in the agency's work or philosophy can lead to volunteer withdrawal. This can also be affected by personality clashes and the breakdown of relationships between volunteers and staff members. McCudden (2000) found that volunteers continued in the Home Start scheme researched because they supported the ethos of Foróige, they regarded their work as worth while, cared about the families they worked with, and had pride in Foróige. This shows that there are a number of inter-linking issues that were important to these volunteers in maintaining their volunteering role; ethos of Foróige, valuing the work they were involved in, care for the recipients of their work, and pride in Foróige they work for. The latter issue is supported by Locke, Ellis and Davis Smith's (2003) findings that a loss of confidence in Foróige's ethos or philosophy can lead to a withdrawal of volunteer services.

Grube and Piliavin (2000) looked at the importance of integrating the idea of being a volunteer into the self concept to the maintenance of the activity. By this, Grube and Piliavin (2000) suggested that being a volunteer over a long period would increase the commitment to Foróige, which leads to the incorporation of a volunteer role to personal identity, resulting in the continuity of the volunteer activity. Volunteers commit themselves to their volunteering role and, to Foróige they are volunteering for, this incorporated being a volunteer as a regular part of their lives. In turn volunteers come to see volunteering as part of who they are, which encourages them to continue volunteering.

2.5.5 Social support and ties with other volunteers

Social support is seen as a huge organisational protective factor. This social support was found to come in the form of friendships and networks made with other volunteers, and through the volunteering experience. Links can also be seen between a positive relationship and social support from other volunteers in Foróige, and intent to remain a volunteer. Haski-Leventhal and Bargal noted that *"people may start to volunteer for certain reasons, such as a desire to help others, and continue to do so for different reasons, such as a strong affiliation with a volunteer peer group"* (2008, pg. 70). From this research, the importance of social relationships inside Foróige was emphasised. This corresponds with the findings of several

other researchers (including Grube & Piliavin 2000), which suggest that social relationships inside Foróige provide a good organisational climate and help to make the performed activity pleasant. It was also noted by Carmen Hidalgo and Moreno that *“the creation of affective bonds with other members of Foróige can make volunteers reluctant to break those bonds and, therefore, they remain volunteers”* (2009, pg. 599). From their research, Carmen Hidalgo and Moreno (2009) found that good social relationships inside an organisation, support from Foróige staff, positive evaluation of the job they perform and training they receive, contribute positively to their intention of remaining in the volunteer activity.

The main factor in sustained volunteering appears to be that volunteers are managed in an explicit, developmental, supportive and appreciative way. This is asserted by Cnaan and Casacio (1999) comment that volunteer satisfaction and retention can in part be explained by positive practices in volunteer management. It was, however, noted that different types of organisations have different types of volunteers, and this may make it somewhat difficult to generalise.

Carmen Hidalgo and Moreno (2009) found that creating a friendly climate, and supporting the volunteer with training and supervision, as well as gratifying and non repetitive tasks are clear ways to promote volunteer retention. In this way, Carmen Hidalgo and Moreno (2009) suggested that volunteer managers and organisations should favour and invest in these areas, in order to promote increased volunteer retention.

2.6 Influence of Foróige on Volunteering

Hustinx and Handy (2009) asked if volunteers' attachments were to an organisation as a whole, or whether volunteers find their attachments lying with the local programmes or groups they are involved in. Foróige has one overall framework and ethos which ensures that all volunteers have one constant mission, and this unites all volunteers. However, the majority of volunteers are divided out among clubs around the country. Hustinx and Handy commented that:

managers recruiting volunteers should be cautious in using overarching mission statements to attract volunteers. Rather attention should be put on the attractiveness of programmes and local specificities that impact volunteers (2009, pg. 217).

The importance of volunteers having a sense of belonging in an organisation where there are local and central forces involved, has been stressed. It is important that these volunteers understand where they see themselves belonging in the overall organisation. Are they committed to Foróige itself or to the local group they are involved with? Clary and Snyder (1991) discuss one of the most important motivations for volunteering as being a desire among people to see their values and beliefs actualised in what they do. In this way choosing to volunteer with a particular organisation would suggest that the individual identifies with and

shares the values and goals of this particular organisation. This may then lead to a sense of responsibility for Foróige as a whole.

Questions have been raised around whether volunteer organisations build an overall organisational attachment beyond attachment at the point of entry to Foróige. Or is the attachment based on the work that is done with their local branch or group? Hustinx and Handy (2009) talk about differences in volunteer attachments being affected by the intensity of the local volunteer experience. The strong and positive effects of length of service and hours of volunteering point to different socialisation experiences at the local level. As well as this, relationships are built with other volunteers and staff from Foróige at a local level, as that is where the majority of the volunteering work is done. The intensity of this participation does not affect the importance attached to the mission of Foróige, but it does positively impact feelings of loyalty and satisfaction. In this way, the types of volunteer management required, with regard to recruitment and retention, must necessarily vary to reflect the manner in which organisational attachments are made.

Although Hustinx and Handy's (2009) research only studied one organisation, the findings are useful for other large organisations with different local sections to understand how attachments to Foróige are built.

2.7 Conclusion

Motivation, commitment and satisfaction are three areas that this researcher would have anticipated as having the greatest impact on volunteer retention.

Research has shown that volunteer retention is more closely linked with organisational practises, and that commitment and satisfaction are linked to Foróige rather than the individual themselves. The ethos of Foróige and relationships within Foróige also play a much larger role in the retention of volunteers.

The aim of this chapter was to give the reader an insight into relevant research and literature relating to the areas of volunteering and volunteer retention. The research highlights people's motivations to volunteer, as well as the fact that these motivations do not necessarily correlate with the reasons people continue to volunteer. It would appear from the research that the retention of volunteers has much more to do with Foróige and organisational structures than with people's intrinsic or extrinsic motivations to volunteer. The research highlights the benefits of supervision and continued training within organisations and the importance of ensuring volunteers feel valued and appreciated.

The next chapter will give an outline of the methods used to collect data and how the researcher engaged in this process.

Chapter 3 Methodology

3.1 Introduction

This chapter will outline the methodology employed in this study. The methods used include literature review and semi-structured interviews, a discussion around the appropriateness of these methods and why they were chosen will take place. The framework underpinning the study will be explained and discussed in terms of how this influenced the data collection and analysis. There will also be a discussion around ethical considerations; which influenced the findings and recommendations of this study. Foróige's involvement in the process will also be discussed throughout this chapter.

3.2 Qualitative Research

Qualitative research relies on people's experience of their social world to inform research rather than numbers and figures: *"By the term 'qualitative research' we mean any type of research that produces findings not arrived at by statistical procedures or other means of quantification"* (Strauss and Corbin, 1998, pg. 11). Ritchie and Lewis go on to explain what qualitative research is:

qualitative methods are used to address research questions that require explanation or understanding of social phenomena and their contexts. They are particularly well suited to exploring issues that hold some complexity and to studying processes that occur over time (2003, pg. 5).

Due to the exploratory nature of this study, qualitative methods are the most appropriate to gain an in depth analysis and understanding of sustained volunteering.

During the first meeting with Foróige, we had discussed the use of quantitative methods. At the time this appeared to be a very positive way to approach the study, however on reflection the researcher felt that quantitative methods would not be sufficient to gather enough information to understand people's commitment to volunteering. The broad aim of the research is to gain insight into volunteer retention and what encourages people to stay involved in Foróige over a long period of time. The research involves looking at feelings, experiences and ideas; all of which could not be captured in a questionnaire as they are difficult to measure. The researcher discussed this with Foróige, and it was agreed that as this was an exploratory study, a qualitative method would be more suitable to obtain the required information.

3.3 Research Methodology

Methodology creates a framework for theoretical understanding, while it is also concerned with ethical issues and moral dilemmas in a study. This research will be located within an interpretive framework.

...a methodology influenced by interpretivism will emphasise the importance of meaning, identity and personal experience to research

participants, and will therefore seek to use a method such as the interview which is able to explore personal experience in great detail (Carey, 2009, pg. 90).

This framework looks to uncover the meaning of people's experiences of the social world. Interpretivism works towards understanding the opinions, emotional responses and attitudes of research participants, linking these to their behaviours and actions and finally, placing these thoughts and actions into perspective (Carey, 2009). The research is based in the interpretive perspective for a number of reasons. The most important of which was noted by Ritchie and Lewis (2003), when they discussed how qualitative research placed emphasis and value on the human interpretive aspects of knowing about the social world. The significance of the researcher's own interpretation of the subject being studied is also important within the interpretive framework. Interpretivism places an emphasis on the inter-relatedness of different parts of people's lives and how these put meaning on people's understanding of their social world.

This framework was the most appropriate framework for the research as the study was looking at attitudes towards volunteering and the reasons participants continued to volunteer. This information was then used to propose strategies for retaining volunteers in Foróige.

3.4 Methods

In order to conduct this research, two methods were used; literature review and semi structured interviews.

3.4.1 Literature review

Bryman (2008, pg. 81) describes a literature review as giving the researcher the opportunity to *"demonstrate that you are able to engage in scholarly review based on your reading and understanding of the work of others in the same field"*. The literature review gives the researcher an opportunity to review other research in the area and discover what is already known about the topic. The literature review assisted with the formulation of interview questions and the collation and discussion of research data collected.

3.4.2 Semi structured interviews

The semi structured interview format was chosen as this type of interview gives the opportunity to gain access to attitudes and values of participants. It allows for flexibility and the exploration of underlying views. Semi structured interviews involve both planned and unplanned questions. The unplanned questions give the researcher the opportunity to further explore participants responses to questions asked. Carey discusses the semi structured

interview as also giving the researcher the opportunity to *“unpack and expand upon answers that were perhaps a little unclear”* (2009, pg. 113).

3.5 Sampling

Qualitative researchers choose research participants for the qualities they can bring to the study. Participants are chosen in relation to who can give the greatest possible insight into the topic. With this in mind and through discussions with Foróige, it was decided that non probability sampling, in the form of purposive sampling, was the most appropriate way to gather participants for the study. Ritchie, Lewis and Elam explain that in purposive sampling participants are chosen because *“they have particular features or characteristics which will enable detailed explorations and understanding of the central themes... which the researcher wishes to study”* (2003, pg. 78). Foróige agreed to source participants for the study. Participants needed to have been volunteering with Foróige for more than three years. It was also felt that this particular sample would provide particular insight into the reason behind sustained volunteerism in Foróige.

3.6 Data Collection and Analysis

As previously discussed in this chapter there was a collective decision between Foróige and the researcher in relation to the method used for collecting the data. After some discussion, the method of semi structured interviewing was deemed the most suitable method of data collection. A research pack was given to each participant explaining the research topic, the rationale and what was expected of the participant. All participants signed a consent form granting their consent for the interview to be recorded, and the information used in the writing up of this dissertation, and any subsequent publications (see appendices). Data was recorded using a dictaphone, these recordings were then transcribed. In order to analyse the data collected coding was used. Richards and Morse discuss the purpose of coding as:

...getting from unstructured and messy data to ideas about what is going on in the data. All coding techniques have the purpose of allowing the researcher to simplify and focus on some specific characteristics of the data. (2007, pg. 133).

Coding was done by way of theme and different colours were used to highlight different themes.

3.7 Ethical Considerations

Carey (2009) discusses the power a researcher has over their participants. Ethical concerns appear to revolve around main four themes; harm, consent, privacy and confidentiality of data (Punch, 1998). Each of these themes was addressed at each stage of the research process. With regard to harm to participants; each participant was approached by Foróige and asked if they would be willing to participate, contact details of those willing were then passed on to the researcher and each participant was contacted. The purpose of the research was explained and a time to meet was arranged. The privacy of the participants was ensured with

participants not being named in the written dissertation and all information relating to them and their involvement in Foróige was kept confidential. Participants were assured that the researcher was the only one who would have access to the data, and that it would be stored in a safe place and the voice recordings would be destroyed after the University exam boards. One ethical issue arose for the researcher during the study and that was the fact that Foróige chose the participants and was aware of who was being interviewed as part of the study. The researcher did her best to ensure that all the participants' anonymity was maintained, and that no identifying information was evident throughout the dissertation.

3.8 Conclusion

This chapter explained the methodological approach used by the researcher. Qualitative research was used as the subject of volunteer retention required insight into the perceptions and opinions of long-term volunteers. This qualitative research was located within an interpretivist framework which ensures the researcher is not only aware of participants' ideas about the social world, but also the thought process behind these ideas. The qualitative data was collected using semi structured interviews and then analysed using emerging themes from the literature and from the data collected. The sample was chosen purposively and every effort was made to ensure anonymity, confidentiality, and that no harm was caused to any participant at any stage of the research.

The next chapter will consider the data collected and the keys themes that emerged from this data. This will be followed by a discussion in relation to these key themes.

Chapter 4 Data Analysis and Findings

4.1 Introduction

In this chapter the main findings of the research will be presented. In researching this piece the researcher interviewed six participants. The participants each had personal experience and knowledge of volunteering, and had been volunteering for between eight and twenty three years. Their input highlighted issues around commitment to volunteering and volunteer retention within Foróige. To ensure anonymity the participants will be referred to as Participants One, Two, Three, Four, Five and Six. All participants were asked the same questions. Using the literature review and the model presented in table 2.1, the data collected has been considered with regard to a number of prominent themes. This chapter will discuss these key themes and issues that arose from the data collection.

4.2 Training and support

4.2.1 Training

Adequate preparation and training was cited throughout the literature as a protective factor for volunteer retention. This sentiment was echoed by each participant who felt that training was essential to sustained volunteering. All participants agreed that training was vital to volunteer retention. However because of the voluntary nature of training, a number of the participants commented that not everyone avails of this training. Participant Two commented that training is not compulsory and that no one appears to be monitoring who has done what training *“the induction training is compulsory yeh, you will have to do the other levels at some point but you’re not actually made do it and no one really checks”*. This participant also commented that there are some areas of training she believes should be compulsory. It was explained that there was Safe Talk training offered to volunteers. This training prepares volunteers to recognise people with thought of suicide and connect them to suicide first aid resources (National Office for the Prevention of Suicide, 2011). The participant believed that this training should be compulsory for all volunteers as it is an issue that could arise in any club at any time.

Participant Four talked about the value of training in giving leaders confidence to work with the young people and to know they are running the club in an appropriate way;

I think the training gave me the confidence really and when you know what you are doing is right you have no fear then and you know its confidence really I suppose is the right word.

While Participant Three commented

...for the first year, as I say, I was terrified. I wasn’t sure if I’d last... but as I got the training, plus the back up from the Regional Youth Officer, which was vital...it all started to come together.

This corresponds with findings from Haski-Leventhal and Bargal (2008) who comment on volunteers experiencing shock and surprise when they embark on their volunteering role and that their expectations of the work were a lot different to the reality of the role itself.

Participant Four talked about the difficulty encountered in trying to encourage volunteers to engage with training;

I'm having fierce trouble getting any of our leaders to go away and do the training and the main reason for that really is that the more you go into it the more you will be expected to do and the more responsibility that you'll have to take.

On further probing as to whether this expectation was perceived by volunteers or was an actual expectation, the participant replied that in general he believed it was perceived. He did however suggest that it could be seen that once you sign up for one thing outside your role as club leader *"it's just a matter of fact that you will be roped into other things"*. From this it could be seen that although training is a retentive factor for some volunteers, other volunteers may see it as putting pressure on them to become more involved in Foróige. Training was also named as a supportive factor by each of the participants.

4.2.2 Support

Each participant was very vocal about the positive role the Regional Youth Officers (RYO) play in supporting leaders.

The Regional Youth Officer is only a phone call away and that's a huge thing really and it's critical that stays there because you have that all the time. And like I'm there [a number] years now and I've done level four training... but at the same time you have to have the services of the RYO immediately and I know that's there. (Participant Six)

It appears the Regional Youth Officer is generally the main source of support for leaders. There is no supervision element to the volunteering role. A number of participants said that they believed the opportunity to discuss issues arising from their volunteer role, would benefit volunteers. Haski-Leventhal and Bargal (2008) talk about volunteering as being a small part of people's lives but they also comment that being heavily involved in members lives without proper training and support can cause volunteers to burn out. It appears to be the club leader who has the most contact with the Regional Youth Officer, and it may be that the leaders get their support from the club leader. The club leader is in turn supported by the RYO. As far as the participants in the research are aware, there is no formal supervision structure within Foróige. Although some participants felt that this would be a positive thing, others felt formal or scheduled supervision would take up more time and mean more time away from people's lives in general. Participant Two commented that it would *"be nice if someone checked in to see how the leaders were doing from time to time, and not just the young people"*.

Each of the participants felt they were supported by Foróige, and they felt that this was a positive factor in their retention. This corresponds with Carmen Hidalgo and Moreno's (2009) findings, that volunteers who feel supported by an organisation are significantly more likely to stay involved over a longer period of time.

A number of the participants mentioned District Council meetings as a source of support. At these meetings leaders meet up and discuss club and organisational business, but also have the opportunity to share experiences.

I see District Council as vital. It's a vital support, there are two supports as I see it, the youth officers and the District Council and the two of them working together I think are what give the leader the confidence to really go out and do stuff. (Participant Three)

This was named as a supportive factor by a number of participants; however, Participant Four explained that;

...in the past you'd go to District Council meetings and there would be thirty or forty people at them, now there's less than ten and it's the same ten every month and you're talking about different ideas and training, everyone that's there probably has level four training done already...

Although this participant felt that District Council was a good source of support he named that it was experienced volunteers who attended the meetings and the level of support experienced volunteers require is different from that of less experienced volunteers. This participant felt that the less experienced volunteers would benefit from the support of District Council but encouraging them to go was a challenge.

4.3 Motivation and Value of Volunteer Role

4.3.1 Motivation to volunteer

There was a question asked in relation to what initially motivated the participants to assume their volunteering roles. The researcher had originally believed that reasons for motivation would tie in as protective factors for volunteer retention. However, it can be seen from literature that this may not always be the case, and particularly Kovacs and Black (1999) warn against assuming this. When asked about motivations to volunteer, each of the participants discussed a community wide need to provide a place for young people to go, and an activity for them to be involved in. A number of the participants had been approached by members of the community and asked to become involved, while other participants saw the need to set up a club, and went about organising these themselves. In all, the overarching motivation was to work with young people, and give them an outlet to express themselves and develop their skills and abilities.

Meier and Stutzer (2004) discussed two groups of motivational factors; intrinsic and extrinsic motivations. It is evident that the participants in this study all volunteered for intrinsic reasons;

they enjoy helping others. This in turn increases their well being, as they are internally rewarded due to an intrinsic motivation to care for others. People, who volunteer for extrinsic reasons, volunteer in order to get something tangible from their volunteer experience. This could be in the form of work experience in order to apply for a college course, as can be seen with the Masters of Social Work, or for career advancement, among other reasons. It could be inferred from this research that people who are intrinsically motivated to volunteer stay in their role for a longer period of time, as they are not looking for an outcome. Whereas achieving a desired outcome may lead volunteers with extrinsic motivations to withdraw from their volunteer role.

4.3.2 Value Placed on the Volunteer Role

Each participant talked about the value of the work they did with the young people they volunteered with, and the importance of *“making a difference”*. The participants placed significant value on this as a retention factor for sustained volunteering. Participant Three talked about wanting the young people to be the best they can be *“this doesn’t mean winning the race but maybe improving by a quarter of a second the next time”*. This links in with Alexander’s (2000) findings which found that volunteer Constables who felt they were utilised in a worthwhile manner were more likely to continue their volunteering role over a longer period of time. In this way volunteers who see the young people benefiting from the work they do within Foróige, may be more likely to continue to volunteer over an extended period of time.

Participant One also talked about volunteers not understanding, and therefore not valuing the most basic aspects of the work they do

One thing I always find about leaders is that they feel compelled to be doing something and its not unusual to be finishing up on a Friday night and have the other leaders say ‘oh God we did nothing tonight, we did nothing last week, we did nothing the week before’ but I actually think quite the opposite. I think the fact that you were there and they come in and they might only have a chat or you might play a bit of music or you might discuss something...

This participant felt the most important work could be done informally with the young people. He felt that leaders wanted to see specific pieces of work done with the young people, and that not all leaders understood that the informal work was equally as valuable, if not more valuable. Carmen Hidalgo and Moreno (2009) talk about the importance of volunteers positively evaluating the job they perform, from this, it could be seen that volunteers who don’t feel positive about the work they are doing, perhaps questioned their role as a volunteer, and the worth of their staying involved with Foróige. This is supported by Locke, Ellis and Davis Smith (2003) who found that a loss of confidence in the work of an organisation, or they work they are involved with in an organisation, can lead to volunteer withdrawal.

The value placed on volunteers by Foróige was also discussed. A number of participants said that they felt there could be more recognition of volunteers and the good work they do. The Task Force on Active Citizenship (2008) deemed praise and recognition of volunteers to be an important part of volunteer retention. This coincides with findings from Locke, Ellis and Davis Smith (2003) which emphasise the importance of organisations recognising and appreciating the good work volunteers do. Participant Six commented that volunteers do not want continuous praise for their good work, but would appreciate the work they do with young people being recognised and acknowledged. Participant Two observed that big achievements are recognised by Foróige, but that it was the smaller achievements that were more important such as the one to one work volunteers do with young people who may be struggling in other areas of their lives;

...it's not the every day achievements like a teenager can come in practically almost mute and go out like you know with a totally different outlook, have loads of confidence and everything in that sense and that's not being portrayed... (Participant Two)

Participant Four commented that a leaders night at the end of the year would celebrate the achievements of the year, and also give Foróige the opportunity to thank the volunteers for their work throughout the year *"everybody likes to be praised"*. He did however comment that at times the District Council does try to organise something at the end of the year, but it does not always work out.

Praise and recognition can be seen as factors in volunteer retention. It is possible that a structure for recognising the achievements of leaders in Foróige, as well as young people would further aid sustained volunteering in Foróige.

4.4 Influence of Organisation on Sustained Volunteering

4.4.1 Local and Central involvement

All participants interviewed are involved as club leaders at a local level. A number of the participants have also been involved at both District and National levels. The participants who were involved to a higher level commented that this has kept them enthused for their volunteering role, and has also been a significant sustaining factor for them. Participant Five commented that he would not have stayed involved in Foróige so long if it wasn't for becoming involved nationally. This participant found that this rejuvenated his volunteering experience, and that he became involved in other tasks he enjoyed, such as administration and decision making.

Participant One commented that a volunteer could only be involved at District or National level if they were volunteering with a club. This participant believed that some volunteers may feel ready to give up their club position, but would like to continue volunteering with Foróige at some level. This participant went on to say there should be opportunities for people to stay involved with Foróige, after they feel they have finished their direct involvement with young

people. This participant felt he may have taken a break from the work he was doing with the club, if he had the opportunity to keep on the work he was doing nationally.

Volunteers who opt to become involved at a higher level within Foróige have a clear attachment to Foróige as a whole. However these volunteers may benefit from being able to take a step back from their club to ensure the extra responsibilities do not lead to volunteer burn out. Participant Two commented that people *“just don’t have the time anymore”* to be involved in other parts of Foróige, while Participant Four commented that *“people just don’t want the extra responsibility”*.

It should be noted that all these participants have been involved in Foróige for more than eight years. Hustinx and Handy (2009) explain that it is only through longer-term service that volunteers come to appreciate the overall ethos and philosophy of an organisation as a whole. These volunteers have extensive experience, and from this their attachment to Foróige is clear. There may be a need to look at less experienced volunteers attachment to Foróige as a whole, to see if the attachment is purely from length of service, or if anything can be done to foster attachment early on in the volunteering relationship.

4.4.2 Ethos of Foróige

The ethos of Foróige played an important role in a number of the participants sustained volunteering. These participants discussed Foróige’s focus on young people’s development and giving young people the responsibility to run their own club. Participant One in particular found the fact that he was not there in the role of supervisor, but was there more as a friend rather than someone to control the meetings, a very positive experience. Participant Four also talked about the philosophy of Foróige being an important factor in remaining involved. This participant spoke about *“dropping in to see what a meeting was all about and I was very impressed”*. The participant went on to explain seeing a young girl chairing the meeting on his first visit. He commented on how impressive this was; that the young girl was able to manage herself in this role, particularly as she was giving out to the group about a project that had not worked out due to lack of commitment. This participant commented that it was in this that he could see something *“special”* about Foróige.

When asked the same question about the importance of the ethos of Foróige as a factor in continued commitment to volunteering, Participant Two commented that personally it had little to do with Foróige and was all about the difference that could be made in the lives of the young people. This participant placed little value on the idea of the young people running their own meetings. Likewise Participant Four felt that young people in the community needed a voice, and this was something he had an understanding of. But he didn’t feel strongly about how Foróige gave young people this voice. He did however, follow up by saying;

...it was putting a challenge on young people and you know, you think about it for five minutes and you say, oh God yeh, that's a great idea, that's the right way to do it...

Although this participant did not believe the ethos of Foróige was a factor in his remaining a volunteer, he did place value on it and the effect this has on young people and their development.

4.5 Continued Commitment to Volunteer Role

4.5.1 Understanding the commitment involved from the outset

The theme of commitment can be seen in relation to the Alexander (2000) study which suggested that people who have less life choices make longer commitments and stay with an organisation longer. It was highlighted by Participant Two, that she felt people did not understand what was expected of them when they joined Foróige. She felt more could be done to highlight the level of commitment required:

... it's people go into it I think blind as well. They are not fully sure of what Foróige is all about, about the commitment side of things and then like you know when you have hiccups in the club, they'll say ah feck this, you know, it's kind like what am I doing here?

This participant felt that more could be done in the recruitment of leaders to highlight the nature of the role and the commitment expected. Participant Five also mentioned that they felt a significant reason for struggling to retain volunteers was to do with;

A lot of the time its just a leaders own idea of what a club should be when they come on board and then they just can't understand the idea of the members running the club themselves.

Again this appears to highlight that some volunteers are unprepared for their role and do not know what to expect when embarking on a volunteer role with Foróige.

4.5.2 Positive impact of volunteering on volunteers own lives

This is one aspect of volunteering that did not appear to be looked at extensively in research, and did not play a part in the model of withdrawal and continuation factors seen in the literature review. However, throughout each of the interviews the positive impact of volunteering on the participants own lives was discussed. Participant Three commented

I suppose it [the work] then kind of went into my own personal life in they way I look at things, I got influenced by that, influenced by the kids. And the one thing that keeps coming back is just how much you learn from them and how much they surprise you.

Volunteering with Foróige clearly had an impact on this participant in their personal life and they felt that this was very much part of the reason they stayed involved over a long period of time.

This positive impact of volunteering could also be put down to the training and development opportunities offered to volunteers. Participant Four talked about his experience with Foróige helping him make difficult decisions he may have avoided in the past:

You are able to kind of think about things and make a call on things... and the experience to be able to say things to people that a couple of years ago I would have thought Jesus no, I'd never be able to do that...

This participant clearly felt that his experience with Foróige gave him confidence both in his role as Club Leader and in his personal life. From this it can be seen that Foróige has benefits not only for the young people involved, but also for the volunteers. This corresponds with comments from participant one;

Foróige continuously talk about what they do for young people, they don't talk about the things they actually do for adults, because you know a lot of the training that adults get stand to them in good stead in their own lives, in other areas...

Participants discussed the positive impact their volunteering role has on their work/life balance. Participants spoke about looking forward to leaving a stressful work day behind and going to the club and getting involved with the young people. Participant Two commented *"I get a great buzz out of it, it's coming to the end of the week and I'm saying 'yes it's [Organisation] night!'"* Participant Five spoke of hearing a number of his volunteers talk each week about how being involved in the club really helps them forget about all the other things going on in their lives, and just concentrate on the young people for those few hours.

4.5.3 Ties to other volunteers

Grube and Piliavin (2000) highlight the importance of social relationships within an organisation. It is suggested that these relationships provide a platform for good organisational climate and make the volunteering work more pleasant. Participant Four commented that the volunteers within the club are all friends and they meet regularly outside the club *"...because we are all very similar we have a great friendship going and a great camaraderie between us..."* This participant maintains that this is part of the reason he continues to stay involved with the club. Participant One spoke about knowing volunteers from all parts of the country. The participant went on to speak about enjoying meeting up with the different volunteers and sharing their different experiences. The social aspect did not play a significant role for participant Six. This participant believes that if a volunteer is going to leave, social ties would not be retaining factor. While Participant Five felt the support of fellow leaders was an important factor in his continued involvement, particularly following an incident with the parent of a young person. This participant felt the support and back up of the other volunteers in the group was invaluable.

There was varying opinions on the significance of social ties and relationships with other volunteers as a retaining factor in volunteering. A number of participants felt that positive

relationships with other volunteers was very important in keeping people involved while other participants felt that social ties were insignificant to the work and to sustained volunteering.

4.6 Conclusion

This chapter aimed to put forward the overarching themes emerging from the data collected. The participants used their experience and knowledge of volunteering to answer questions on a range of issues pertaining to the volunteer experience with Foróige. Their feelings on volunteer retention and that which has kept them committed to their volunteer role were also explored. Locke, Ellis and Davis Smith surmised that the main factor in volunteer retention is the management of volunteers in an “explicit, developmental, supportive and appreciative way” (2003, pg. 87). Participants views and experience of volunteer management were clearly evident in the themes discussed; training and support, motivation and value, influence of Foróige and continued commitment. These themes then created the basis of the findings.

The next chapter will present a conclusion to this piece of research and a number of recommendations coming from the research itself.

Chapter Five Conclusions and Recommendations

5.1 Introduction

This chapter draws together key findings from the literature review, interviews and data analysis. Implications for social work practice and recommendations for future volunteer retention practices will also be presented. This information will come together to answer the core research questions outlined in chapter one.

Although generalising the findings and recommendations is somewhat difficult due to the small sample size, it is hoped that this piece of research will help not only Foróige, but other volunteer organisations to look at practical ways to improve volunteer retention over longer periods of time.

5.2 Summary of Findings

The research aimed to explore the long term retention of volunteers. From reviewing literature and interviewing participants, a number of key themes emerged, as well as a number of further questions for moving forward.

From the findings it is clear that Foróige is doing a substantial amount to encourage volunteers to remain committed. There were a number of key findings in relation to what encourages sustained volunteering. There were also a number of findings in relation to what more could be done to foster further volunteer retention. There was an overwhelming consensus that training, development and support are the most important retention factors, along with volunteers feeling valued and appreciated. The model of withdrawal and continuation factors presented in chapter two clearly shows the most prominent continuation and withdrawal factors for volunteers. This table was created from the literature, and the findings appear to tie closely with this table.

There was clear agreement among participants about the importance of training for their volunteer role. Training gives the leaders confidence to carry out their role within Foróige and the ability to deal with situations that may arise. This confidence is invaluable for volunteers to be able to facilitate the groups they work with, and to encourage young people to get involved and get the most out of their time with Foróige.

It was also evident that although the volunteers interviewed did feel supported by Foróige; the development of a further, more structured support system would benefit volunteers. Support is provided by the Regional Youth Officer however this appears to be on an ad hoc basis and there is no formal mechanism of support or supervision for volunteers. A number of participants believed access to more regular support would be beneficial to the volunteers in Foróige.

The effect of volunteering on personal life was not a strong theme that emerged from literature, however it was a clear theme throughout data collected. The positive impact of the training provided by Foróige, and the volunteer role, working with young people, clearly benefited each of the participants in different ways. Confidence appeared to be the main benefit along with skills learned from training. This was a significant sustaining factor for a number of the participants.

The ethos of Foróige emphasises that each young person is unique and encourages young people to build on their talents and become active citizens. This is done partially by the young people running their own meetings. The ethos of Foróige was a positive retention factor for a number of participants. These participants felt that working with the young people rather than being in control of them is a very important aspect of the work they do. This ties in with the importance of congruence between values of the volunteer and that of Foróige. Each of the participants involved felt the work they are doing is worthwhile and that they are making a difference to the young people they work with. Each of participants spoke of the value they placed on this work with the young people.

It can be seen from the research that people who are intrinsically motivated to volunteer appear to remain involved with Foróige over a longer period of time. This is an important finding for Foróige as it shows that volunteers who are extrinsically motivated are more likely to withdraw from Foróige when they have achieved a certain goal. It would appear there is little Foróige can do about this type of volunteer drop off as these volunteers would appear not to be committed to the young people or Foróige but to specific personal goals.

From the outset this author believed that motivation to volunteer played a significant role in people's intention to remain volunteers. It is clear from the literature and data collected that this is not necessarily the case. Although intrinsic motivation to volunteer does appear to be a protective factor for volunteer retention, the more significant retentive factor would appear to be the management of volunteers within an organisation. From this research it would appear that the most prominent aspects of management related to sustained volunteering are; training, support and recognition.

5.3 Recommendations

It was suggested in the literature review that higher educational attainment and previous volunteering experience were also primary protective factors for volunteer retention. Due to limited word count, a detailed exploration of these factors was not feasible; however these are aspects of volunteer retention that may require further investigation in the future.

The recommendations made by the researcher are based on the views of participants and findings from the interviews. The broad aim of the research was to explore the long term

retention of volunteers. It is clear from the research that there are many positive retention factors already evident in Foróige, however the development and promotion of current structures, as well as the possible addition of supports, could be made to further facilitate sustained volunteer involvement.

- Training featured as a major theme in terms of volunteer retention. All volunteers should actively be encouraged to take part in all levels of training. Training should evolve with the changing nature of the social world of the young person. An emphasis should be placed on the benefits of training for Foróige, and for the personal development of the volunteer.
- A further recommendation with regard to training is that experienced volunteers should be involved in the facilitation of all training. These volunteers have practical experience that would be valuable to less experienced volunteers. The experienced volunteers also have significant insight into practical issues that may arise for each volunteer and club. It is evident that this would be particularly constructive at induction level.
- Support for volunteers was another key issue that emerged from the research. Volunteers appear to be aware that they are supported by the Regional Youth Officer, however they are unaware of any other supports available, and if they can access any form of supervision around their volunteer role. It is recommended that the support structure in Foróige is clearly defined and presented to volunteers on commencement of their volunteer position. Volunteers should regularly be reminded about how to access support. If there is no specific support structure within Foróige, it is recommended that work is done on creating a formal support structure. This should be presented to all volunteers.
- Praise and recognition were cited by participants as important factors in their continued volunteering. Although participants felt their good work was recognised by Regional Youth Officers, they felt there could be a more formal structure for praise and recognition from Foróige itself. It is recommended that Foróige review the practices for paying tribute to the work of the volunteers within Foróige. It is also recommended that Foróige create a mechanism for recognising volunteers who reach volunteering milestones within Foróige, for example five years involved, ten years involved and so on.

The researcher understands that there may be certain limitations to pursuing these recommendations. These limitations may include financial and resource constraints. However, it is evident from literature and data collected that these recommendations will have

a positive impact on volunteer retention. Every effort should be made to address these issues in so far as possible.

5.4 Implications for Social Work Practice

The current economic climate means that social workers are increasingly relying on volunteer organisations to help support service users. These services rely on volunteers to run groups, do home visitation, man phone lines and provide other social services that people may not be able to access without their support. Due to work load and time constraints, social workers are not always able to provide continued support to service users. Retaining volunteers in these volunteer led groups is important for social workers to ensure they can access the best possible support for their clients, and that this support will continue to be available. Retaining volunteers also means that clients may be able to form relationships with their volunteer in whatever guise, and not worry about this relationship coming to an abrupt end due to a volunteer leaving the service. The importance of training and support identified by the participants can also give confidence to social workers that the groups they are referring their clients to have a positive working environment and that volunteers are trained and happy in the work they do.

5.5 Conclusion

In conclusion the researcher believes that this study has achieved its aims and objectives and core research questions. The final research question related to what can be learned about the nature of volunteerism in Ireland. Although it is difficult to generalise the findings of this piece of research due to it's small scale and it's basis in one area of Ireland, the table presented in chapter two outlines withdrawal and continuation factors for general volunteering. This could be used to inform volunteer retention policies or further research for other volunteer agencies throughout the country.

5.6 Reflection on Research Process

Doing this piece of research taught me how different my own personal perceptions of a subject can be to the reality. As I mentioned on a number of occasions throughout the research I believed that initial motivations to volunteer would play a significant role in continued volunteer involvement and volunteer retention. However this was not the case. This became clear through research for my literature review and this finding surprised me. This meant that already my research was taking a different direction than I thought it would. However, rather than be disappointed or daunted by the task of coming to terms with a new way of thinking about the subject, I was excited by the prospect of discovering something new and different and about my research being used for the benefit of Foróige. At the beginning of the research process I was unsure as to how volunteering could be related to social work practice. This made me worry that my research was not going to be applicable or useful in the

social work arena. Again, as I progressed through the research it became clear to me that volunteering and social work are closely linked and not just because of their closely intertwined past. Volunteers provide all kinds of services within the community and without these services many social work clients would struggle in their daily existence. The importance of retaining volunteers in these roles cannot be stressed enough.

Research no longer appears an over whelming task. In the beginning there appeared an insurmountable amount to do in order to get to this final stage. However with careful planning and hard work the end result is evident here and I believe it is a piece of work to be proud of.

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Appendix One

Research Information Pack

Thank you for agreeing to take part in this piece of research. The research is being carried out in partial fulfilment of the requirements leading to a Masters in Social Work.

The research is being done with the support of a National Youth Work Organisation and University College Cork.

Your participation is completely voluntary and you can choose to withdraw from the study at any time.

Working Research Title

An Exploration of the Long Term Retention of Volunteers in a National Youth Work Organisation

Purpose of the Study

Through this study of volunteers and volunteer retention I hope to explore the reasons behind why people volunteer and what keeps these volunteers committed over a long period of time.

The primary objective of the research is to explore and gain a greater understanding about what keeps volunteers engaged with an organisation over a long period of time. I would hope that the research will provide a clearer understanding about sustained volunteering and that this will enable me to make recommendations about what organisations such as this CSO can do to retain volunteers in the long term.

In order to carry out this study I will explore literature in relation to volunteering, volunteer motivations and volunteer retention. I will carry out 5 semi structured interviews with volunteers who have been involved in Foróige for more than three years. Data from these interviews will assist me in analysing existing literature and data and making recommendations.

Research Questions

The working research questions are as follows;

- What are people's motivations for volunteering?
- What keeps people committed to volunteering over time?
- How can volunteer organisations retain volunteers?
- What can be learned about the nature of volunteerism in Ireland?

Supervisors

Research supervisors are Carmel Halton and Fiachra O'Súilleabhain.

The link person within Foróige is Denis O'Brien

I would like to take this opportunity to thank you again for your participation in this piece of research.

Appendix Two

Letter of Consent

Date: March 2012

I, _____ agree to participate in [student] research study.

The purpose of this study has been explained to me and I understand it.

I am participating in the study voluntarily.

I give my permission for my interview with [student] to be recorded and remain on record until the research has been submitted.

I understand that I can withdraw from the study, without repercussions, at any time whether before it starts or while I am participating.

I understand I can withdraw my permission to use the data within three weeks of the study, in which case the material I have provided will be discarded.

I understand that confidentiality will be maintained at all times and no details regarding myself, other volunteers or places will be mentioned in the study.

I understand that anonymity will be ensured in the written piece with my identity disguised.

I understand that extracts from what I say may be quoted in the thesis and any subsequent publications.

Signed: _____
(Participant)

Signed: _____
(Researcher)

Appendix Three

Semi Structured Interview Questions

Thesis Title: An Exploration of the Long-term Retention of Volunteers in a National Youth Work Organisation

Section One

- Tell me about your experience of volunteering with Foróige.
- How long have you been volunteering with Foróige?
- Can you tell me about what motivated you to volunteer in the first place?
- Do these reasons still play a role in why you continue to volunteer?

Section Two

- Can you tell me about any induction process or opportunities for training that were available to you when you began volunteering with Foróige? (prompt re: ongoing training opportunities).
- Can you tell me about the factors that keep you committed to volunteering?
- Is there anything that might prompt you to give up your volunteering role with Foróige? (Follow up question – anything within Foróige that might prompt you to give up your volunteering role?)
- Does Foróige provide any supports that enable you to continue your volunteering role? (eg. ongoing training, supervision, support from staff etc.)

Section Three

- Does the ethos of Foróige keep you involved or is it a commitment to working with young people in general?
- Do you think there is anything Foróige could do to further retain volunteers?