



merton
connected

PROMOTING EMPLOYEE VOLUNTEERING SCHEMES IN MERTON

April 27th, 2024

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WPI

Promoting Employee Volunteering Schemes in Merton

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This report represents the work of WPI undergraduate students submitted to the faculty as evidence of completion of a degree requirement. WPI routinely publishes these reports on its website without editorial or peer review. For more information about the projects program at WPI, please see <http://www.wpi.edu/project-based-learning/project-based-education>

Abstract

In partnership with Merton Connected, a charitable organization in the London Borough of Merton, our project evaluated the existing employee volunteering schemes in Merton and recommended ways for Merton Connected to enhance and encourage more participation in these programs among employees and employers. Through stakeholder interviews and employee surveys, we discovered various barriers for employees to volunteer, such as time constraints and lack of awareness of employee volunteering activities. We recommend introducing flexibility to the volunteering schemes, increasing advertising efforts, and improving volunteer matching technology. Addressing these issues can increase employee volunteering participation in Merton, benefiting local organizations, employers, and employees.

Acknowledgments

Our team would like to extend our heartfelt gratitude to all individuals who have supported us throughout the duration of our project. Without all of you, this project would not have been possible.

First, thank you to our host organization, Merton Connected, for partnering with WPI and working with our team to achieve the best results possible. We would like to individually thank Tony Molloy, Merton Connected CEO, Beau Fadahunsi, Head of Development and Volunteering, and Loana Vazzano, Volunteering Services Coordinator, and all other individuals at Merton Connected who contributed to this project's success. They have gone above and beyond to make us feel as welcome as possible in our collaboration with them, which is extremely appreciated.

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Finally, we would like to thank all of the individuals whom we interviewed who shared their expertise with us as well as those who took time out of their day to fill out our survey to ensure that our project was as strong as possible.

All of you have contributed immensely to our project and we cannot express our appreciation enough for everyone's help in making a difference in enhancing employee volunteering schemes in Merton.

Thank you.

Executive Summary

Background

Merton Connected is a charitable organization commissioned by the London Borough of Merton that has been supporting and driving the Voluntary, Community, and Social Enterprise (VCSE) sector in Merton since 1984. They collaborate with and assist organizations across this sector to develop volunteering, deliver social prescribing, and provide home visit services. They also develop community-benefiting partnership activities, such as fundraising, training, and financial management for both well-established and new organizations with social objectives. Located in the heart of the socioeconomically disadvantaged east side of Merton in Mitcham, Merton Connected is not solely an observer but an active participant in the daily lives of people struggling with social and financial hardships.

Methodology

The goal of this project was to evaluate the existing employee volunteering schemes in the London Borough of Merton and recommend ways for Merton Connected to enhance and encourage more participation in these programs among employees and employers. We achieved this goal through three main objectives:

- Objective 1: Assess the impact of employee volunteering schemes in Merton.
- Objective 2: Evaluate current and best practices in employee volunteering schemes.
- Objective 3: Recommend how Merton Connected can help foster and improve employee volunteering schemes in Merton.

These objectives involved interviewing individuals from VCSE organizations, companies, and third-party organizations who were directly involved in employee volunteering and providing recommendations based on the commonality of those responses. We accomplished our project goal and objectives during our time in London in March and April of 2024.

Findings

There were several common themes discussed across all stakeholder groups, including motivations for participating in employee volunteering, barriers to participation, incentives for companies to offer such programs, promotion of volunteering opportunities, patterns in employees likely to volunteer, feedback from employees, and types of volunteering schemes.

One of the major barriers to employees engaging in employee volunteering was not having enough time to participate. Almost every representative we spoke to pointed out that limited time was a major reason why employees were unable to participate in volunteering. Most stakeholders said that employees feel like they do not have the availability to take a full day off to volunteer considering the pressure they are under from tasks in their daily jobs.

Another major barrier was the lack of awareness, promotion, and information on all sides (employers, host VCSEs, and third-party organizations). In some stakeholder interviews, the interviewees said that there are even senior-level employees who do not know about employee volunteering opportunities or paid time off available to engage in them. Our survey data also reinforces this idea with 40% of respondents saying the lack of information is a barrier to volunteering.

Despite these barriers, we found that employee volunteering is very well-received and enjoyed. Virtually all of the VCSEs that we spoke with had no negative feedback to report about the experience with employee volunteers. Likewise, most VCSEs said that employees had little to no negative feedback to give. From our survey, 72% of participants of employee volunteering said they were motivated to volunteer for training and skill development. Another common motivation was that employees were motivated to participate in their employee volunteering scheme because they liked the idea of being able to do something good or make a positive impact.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Based on our findings, we compiled a list of recommendations to help Merton Connected improve the current employee volunteering schemes in Merton. Overall, we found that employee volunteering schemes mutually benefit both the employees and employers, as well as the organizations hosting the volunteering activities. These schemes emphasize corporate social

responsibility, career and personal development, and feelings of fulfillment. Below are some of our main conclusions and recommendations.

Time, Workload, and Flexibility

Conclusion: Major factors for employee participation in employee volunteering schemes are time, workload, and flexibility of the employee.

Recommendations: Encourage employers to add more flexibility when developing their employee volunteering schemes. Encourage VCSEs and Merton Connected to have more standardized training in the borough.

Promotion and Awareness

Conclusion: A successful employee volunteering scheme requires adequate advertisement to the employees.

Recommendations: Employers should use as many ways as possible to promote the mission and volunteering opportunities to employees, such as workplace advertisements, newsletters, and personally addressed messages. Merton Connected and host VCSEs in Merton should utilize promotional strategies to connect with companies, such as LinkedIn advertisements.

Matching Technology

Conclusion: There is limited technology in use that allows for seamless matching from employees to host VCSEs in Merton.

Recommendations: We recommend that Merton Connected generates a user feedback form focused on matching employees to volunteer opportunities for current technology and record how long it takes for feedback to be implemented. Contact representatives from the system currently in place who are involved in implementing user feedback changes and describe concerns about unheard feedback and the length of time that it takes to make changes to the system.

Authorship

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Acknowledgments	All	All
Executive Summary	All	All
Table of Contents and List of Figures and Tables	All	All
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1.0 Introduction

London is home to hundreds of thousands of hard-working employees. Many have the ability to take a number of paid days off each year to volunteer, courtesy of their employer, but the evidence suggests they are underutilizing this privilege. The London Benchmarking Group determined that actual employee volunteering engagement is just 14.3% in the UK (Lobo, 2020). Furthermore, over the past 13 years, starting in 2010, the UK government has reduced funding to local councils and other government-related nonprofits (Newcastle University, 2023). Because of this drop in funding, sourcing volunteer services has become more important than ever to ensure that services provided by local councils or community organizations can continue (Hanrahan, 2022). These employees act as an untapped pool of millions of volunteer hours that could be used to help local communities.

Merton Connected is an organization in the London Borough of Merton that supports and drives the Voluntary, Community, and Social Enterprise (VCSE) sector of the borough by developing volunteering, delivering social prescribing¹, providing home visits, and many other services. They have been struggling to develop the volunteering schemes of local employers and have received few employee volunteers in comparison to the many employees that might participate (Merton Connected, 2021, “About Us”). There are limited data on current employee volunteer participation and reasons for, or for the lack of, engagement in Merton. Therefore, they strive to gather data on current volunteering schemes in Merton and look for ways to improve employee volunteering to make it more accessible and trackable. Merton Connected partnered with Worcester Polytechnic Institute (WPI) to identify how they can encourage more employers to offer volunteering schemes and more employees to volunteer.

The goal of this project was to evaluate the existing employee volunteering schemes in the London Borough of Merton and recommend ways for Merton Connected to enhance and encourage more participation in these programs among employees and employers. To accomplish this goal, we identified three objectives:

¹ Social prescribing is an approach that aims to connect patients to a wide range of community groups, activities, and services to meet and improve upon the practical, social, and emotional needs that affect the patients health and wellbeing (*NHS England » Social Prescribing*, n.d.).

- **Objective 1:** Assess the impact of employee volunteering schemes in Merton.
- **Objective 2:** Evaluate current and best practices in employee volunteering schemes.
- **Objective 3:** Recommend how Merton Connected can help foster and improve employee volunteering schemes in Merton.

Through stakeholder interviews and employee surveys, we determined current and best practices, shortfalls, and areas of success in employee volunteering schemes both within Merton and beyond. Using this information, we provided recommendations to Merton Connected that they can utilize internally or refer to stakeholders they partner with to improve their employee volunteering schemes for greater engagement and results.

2.0 Background

This section provides essential background information needed to understand the context of the goal and methodology of this project. It introduces the London Borough of Merton and Merton Connected and explains the concept of a borough council, what VCSE organizations are, and what employee volunteering schemes entail.

2.1 London Borough of Merton

The borough of Merton is located in the southwest portion of London, as shown in red in Figure 1, and is home to more than 215,000 people, according to the 2021 census (About Merton, n.d.). Spanning 15 square miles, Merton has 80,000 households and 7,000 businesses. While most of the businesses are small, they most notably include the All England Lawn Tennis Club, which is located in the west of the borough and attracts hundreds of thousands of visitors annually (About Merton, n.d.).



Figure 1: London Borough of Merton (in red) (London Borough of Merton, 2023)

The socio-economic status (SES) of residents of Merton is not uniform across the borough. A commonly used measure of SES is the deprivation score which is used to show if one area is more deprived than another. The calculation of the score includes the percentage of people living in poverty, with less than 12 years of education, in single-parent households, rented housing units, overcrowded housing units, households without a car, and non-employed adults

under 65. A higher deprivation score indicates greater deprivation (Social Deprivation Index, 2021). The deprivation scores in Merton vary substantially between the western and eastern portions of the borough. The western half is more affluent and includes more parks and open spaces, while the eastern half is notably more deprived and ethnically diverse. Figure 2 shows that many of the LSOAs² within wards³ in the eastern half of the borough are among the most deprived in London, while wards in the western half are among the least deprived in London. The table in Figure 2 shows that overall deprivation is lower in Merton than in the rest of England, and has declined slightly between 2015 and 2019 (Merton - The Place, 2019). Compared to West Merton, East Merton is more densely populated and has a younger population. It is also more ethnically diverse and has many residents who are Black, Asian, and Minority Ethnic (BAME)⁴ as seen in figure 3 (The Merton Story, 2021).

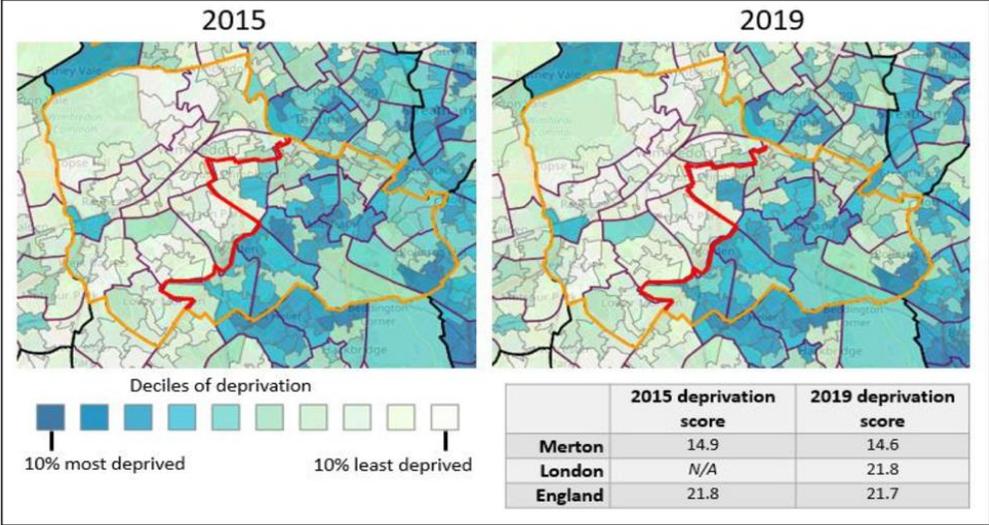


Figure 2: Deciles of Deprivation of Merton from 2015 to 2019 Relative to London and the Whole of England (Indices of Deprivation 2015 and 2019, n.d.)

² Lower layer Super Output Areas (LSOAs) are groupings that usually include between 400 to 1,200 households and 1,000 to 3,000 residents. They are used for small area statistical reporting. These are outlined by the light gray lines in Figure 2 (Census 2021 Geographies, 2021).

³ Wards are electoral areas within a borough. Each ward in Merton is represented by 2 or 3 councilors elected by that ward. These are outlined by the purple lines in Figure 2 (Wards, 2024).

⁴ BAME refers to people of non-white ethnicities in the UK. It includes those who identify as having a mixed ethnicity as well, but it does not include white ethnic groups like White British or White Irish. It is often used when making statistical comparisons to white populations (A guide to race and ethnicity terminology and language, 2023).

Merton as a whole is an ethnically diverse borough, as 38% of the population is from BAME groups. The borough is also religiously diverse and is home to the largest mosque in Western Europe. Census data indicates that 56.1% percent of residents claim to be Christian, and 20.2% claim to have no religion. Islam is the most popular of the five other major religions present in the borough. Furthermore, while most people in the borough speak English as a first language, several other languages, including Polish, Tamil, and Urdu, are commonly spoken (Merton Census Demographics U.K., n.d.).

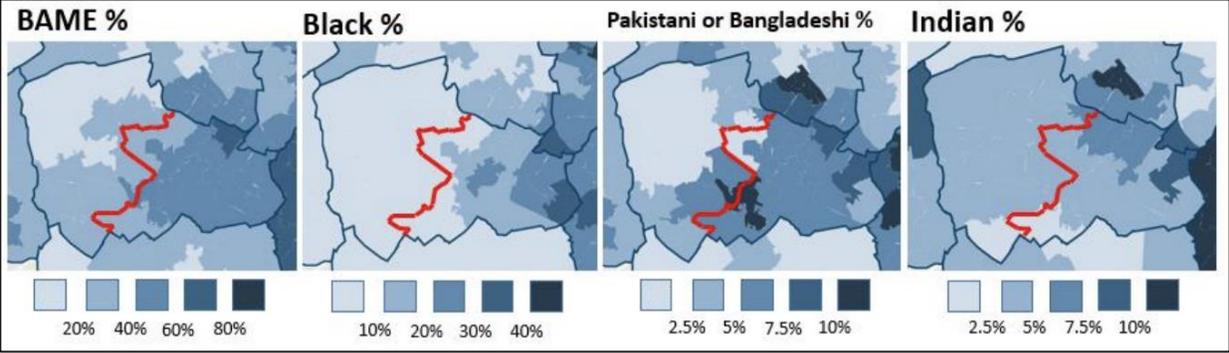


Figure 3: Ethnic Minority Groups in Merton (The Merton Story, 2021)

2.2 Merton London Borough Council

The Merton London Borough Council is the local government authority that is responsible for services across the entire borough, including education, transport, public safety, social care, waste management, tax collection, and council housing. They also work on local issues involving area planning, community shelters, and public spaces. The council can give grants and funding to help local organizations tackle issues within these sectors. The current grant scheme allows councils to partner with voluntary and community organizations to widen the reach of service delivery (About Our Grants Scheme, n.d.).

Ross Garrod of the Labour Party currently holds the leadership role of the council and is chair of the cabinet. Of the 57 total councilors in Merton, there are nine who act as cabinet members underneath Garrod with positions assigned to specific duties. They are elected by their fellow councilors to oversee policy and operations in their respective areas. The current cabinet members, along with their areas of service, are presented in Table 1.

Councilor	Area of Service
Eleanor Stringer	Civic Pride
Stephen Alambritis	Transport
Billy Christie	Finance and Corporate Services
Caroline Cooper-Marbiah	Sport and Heritage
Brenda Fraser	Children’s Services
Natasha Irons	Local Environment, Green Spaces and Climate Change
Andrew Judge	Housing and Sustainable Development
Sally Kenny	Education and Lifelong Learning
Peter McCabe	Health and Social Care

Table 1: Merton Cabinet Members and Areas of Service (London Borough of Merton, n.d.)

Each councilor is elected for 4-year terms by the local community. There are 20 wards that each elect two or three councilors from any party. Most wards are represented by councilors from one party (see Figure 4), but some wards have mixed representation. For example, Lower Morden has one Conservative councilor and two Labour councilors. Of the 57 councilors, 31 represent the Labour Party, 17 are Liberal Democrats, and seven are Conservatives⁵. There are also two Merton Park Ward Independent Residents (MPWIR) (Live Election Results - Merton Local Elections 2022, 2022). Figure 4 shows that Labour councilors predominate in the poorer, eastern part of Merton, Conservatives represent more affluent areas of Wimbledon, and the Liberal Democrats represent the central area in between.

⁵ The Labour Party is viewed as left-center wing with ideals surrounding equal society and a heavy government influence. Analytics classify it as progressive meaning they generally accept and promote change. The Liberal Democrat Party is described as a central party. They advocate for social equality and individual freedom. The Conservative Party is viewed as right-center wing where they strive to protect individual freedom with lower taxes and less regulation. They are categorized as traditional and believe in the systems that have been in place such as the monarchy (Understanding the political spectrum, n.d.).

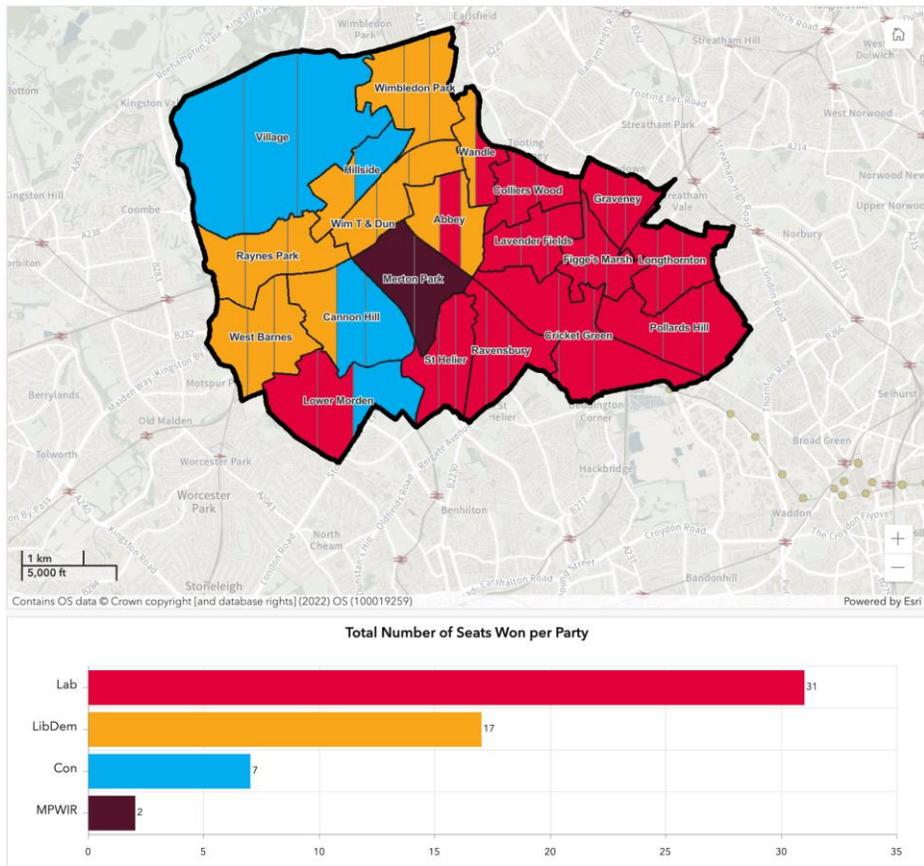


Figure 4: Merton Councilor Party Representation (Live Election Results - Merton Local Elections 2022, 2022)

The entirety of the elected council is responsible for all decisions. As revealed in personal conversation with Beau Fadahunsi, there are about 2,000 council employees who deliver the services required based on these decisions on a day-to-day basis (Fadahunsi, 2024; Understand how your council works, 2017). At the national level, two members of parliament represent Merton as well. They are Siobhain McDonagh of the Labour Party for Mitcham and Morden and Stephen Hammond of the Conservative Party for Wimbledon.

2.3 VCSE Organizations

A Voluntary, Community, and Social Enterprise (VCSE) organization is “an incorporated voluntary, community or social enterprise organisation which serves communities solely within England and which is either: (a) a charity, Community Interest Company or Community Benefit

Society, registered with the relevant registry body; or (b) an unregulated organisation⁶ which has a clear social mission” (Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise (VCSE) Definition | the National Lottery Community Fund, n.d.). Voluntary organizations convene individuals to contribute their time and skills to provide assistance to those in need without financial compensation; community organizations support community-strengthening initiatives; and social enterprises use business strategies to make a social impact (The Role of VCSE Organizations in Public Procurement, 2022).

These organizations primarily consist of charities that aim to transform the way the government provides public services through their social values. Typically, they work with local government authorities, such as councils, to deliver social services to local residents in need where the national or local government does not. Over 75% of them, in fact, provide these services locally, which heightens the impact of their work since they have strong ties to that area and can focus on assisting marginalized or hard-to-reach populations that are not as effectively supported by traditional public sector initiatives (The Role of VCSE Organizations in Public Procurement, 2022). There are currently 250,000 active VCSEs in the UK, and 12,500 (about 5%) have contracts with local or national government entities. Out of these 12,500, 68% have contracts from local governments, followed by 13% with the central government, and 11% with the National Health Service (The Role of VCSE Organizations in Public Procurement, 2022; UK Public Procurement through VCSEs 2016-2020, 2021). The other 95% of VCSEs that do not engage in government contracting focus mostly on other means of improving social initiatives, such as fundraising.

To support their work financially, VCSE organizations most commonly receive money from local councils through contracts or grants (VCSE News and Resources, 2024). They also receive money from central government grants, such as funding from the National Lottery Community Fund managed by the Department for Digital, Culture, Media & Sport (DCMS), grants from private foundations, and donations from individuals and businesses. These funds enable VCSEs to achieve their missions by providing the financial means to assist communities

⁶ In this context, an unregulated organisation is an organization that is not registered as a charity, Community Interest Company or Community Benefit Society. They must also meet various criteria, such as reinvesting surpluses into their social mission, engaging in trading activities for social support, and offering products and services for public benefit (Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise (VCSE) Definition | the National Lottery Community Fund, n.d.).

in need or to fight for social change (The Role of VCSE Organizations in Public Procurement, 2022). Most VCSEs have small full-time and part-time staff. VCSEs spend a substantial portion of their funding on salaries and other operating costs, such as rent and utilities. To keep down costs, bring in professional skills, and foster community engagement, VCSE organizations rely greatly on local volunteers. Should any surplus funds remain at the end of the fiscal year, VCSEs are obliged to reinvest them in the organization. VCSEs typically have a board of directors or trustees drawn from the community to oversee operations and finances.

Many VCSE organizations have evolved from the late 19th and early 20th century charitable societies and philanthropic organizations. Industrialization and urbanization created numerous social problems, including extreme poverty, limited educational opportunities, poor working conditions, and poor healthcare. Charitable and philanthropic organizations grew to address or at least ameliorate these social problems (Gerald, 2005, pp. 253-254). These organizations evolved into modern VCSE organizations. Additionally, significant social and political changes happened in the mid to late 20th century, such as the British Civil Rights Movement, which entailed intense and extensive activism through non-governmental organizations and grassroots movements that shaped the VCSE sector (Gerald, 2005, pp. 253-254). Social enterprises emerged in the late 20th century. These enterprises have adopted business approaches to address societal challenges and mitigate financial hardships (Perera, 2022; The Role of VCSE Organizations in Public Procurement, 2022).

The rise of VCSEs also comes at an important time when local councils have suffered drastic budget cuts due to austerity measures⁷ and can either no longer provide social services or can only do so at drastically reduced levels as before. Local news organizations report that the budget cuts ensuing from the Growth Plan 2022 promoted by former Prime Minister Liz Truss and her former Chancellor of the Exchequer, Kwasi Kwarteng, forced local councils across the UK to take out long-term, 50-year loans of between “£590,000 and £40m” with interest rates up to 4.77% to stay afloat (Helm, 2024). In 2023, 29 local authorities, which include local councils, took on 50-year loans, with some having even higher interest rates of 5%. Additionally, local

⁷ Austerity measures refer to strategies enacted by the Conservative-led government in the UK, initially in 2010, to implement policies aimed at pushing extreme budget cuts. However, they have most negatively affected the poor through major cuts to state spending and loss of public sector jobs. It is debated by many politicians that this endeavor has done very little to stimulate economic growth and has drastically increased public debt (The True Cost of Austerity and Inequality, 2013; Toynbee & Walker, 2020).

authorities continue to face “real-terms spending power cuts of more than 50%”, leading to massive “reductions in services” (Helm, 2024). These financial hardships have led to many local authorities facing bankruptcy, with the average council facing a “£33m predicted deficit by 2025-26 - a rise of 60% from £20m two years ago” with no sign of additional funding in the future (Council Finances 2023-24, 2023). As a result, VCSE organizations have expanded significantly to assist with the services of struggling local authorities.

The VCSE sector has also recently been struggling with the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. According to The Charity Commission COVID-19 Survey 2021, over 90% of charities reported being negatively impacted by the pandemic for various reasons, most related to staff, finances, and service delivery (Reynolds, 2021). Sixty percent of VCSEs saw declining incomes, and 32% percent reported a need for more volunteers. As a result, 33% of all charities have become insolvent since 2019. The recent budget cuts from the Growth Plan 2022, as previously discussed, have undoubtedly exacerbated this situation. Given these hardships, the remaining VCSE organizations are having to work harder to provide support, such as food and essential items, to communities in need (Southby et al., 2021). Some VCSEs have been working with universities to provide real-time data about how the pandemic affected VCSE responses, learning, and resilience (COVID-19 and VCSE Organisations Responses, n.d., “Overview”).

VCSE organizations still see the effects of the pandemic today, and this sector continues to be under much pressure to attend to social issues related to pandemic recovery. In response, they are navigating funding and resource challenges, managing the well-being of volunteers and staff, and adapting to changes in the workplace (Reynolds, 2021). Even with all these challenges, the workers and volunteers at these organizations continue to work hard and show significant resilience to adapt and respond to these changing circumstances to improve society and the communities around them.

2.4 Merton Connected

Merton Connected is a charitable organization commissioned by the London Borough of Merton that has been supporting and driving the Voluntary, Community, and Social Enterprise (VCSE) sector in Merton since 1984. They collaborate and assist organizations across this sector to develop volunteering, deliver social prescribing, and provide home visit services. They also develop community-benefiting partnership activities, such as fundraising, training, and financial

management for both well-established and new organizations with social objectives (Merton Connected, 2021, “About Us”). Located in the heart of the socioeconomically disadvantaged east side of Merton in Mitcham, as seen in Figure 5, Merton Connected is not solely an observer but an active participant in the daily lives of people struggling with social and financial hardships.

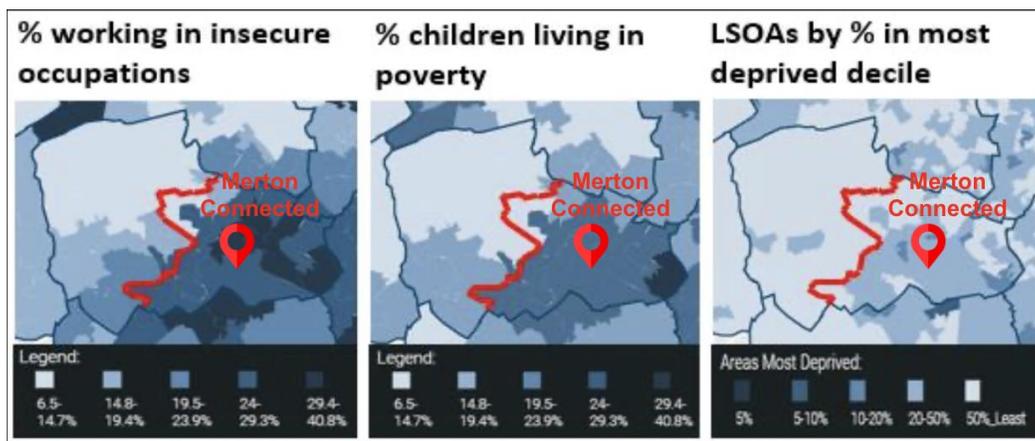


Figure 5: Graph of Socioeconomic Differences of East and West Merton by Scale of Job Insecurity, Children in Poverty, and Deprivation Decile (London Datastore, 2023).

Merton Connected relies on various funding sources to support its activities and other organizations in the community. Their primary and critical funding source is the Merton Borough Council. In 2021, Merton Connected conducted a survey on the current state of the voluntary and community sector (State of the Voluntary and Community Sector in Merton 2021). In 2018/19, 44% of survey participants reported that the borough was a primary funding source, followed by 46% in 2019/20 and 49% in 2020/21 (State of the Voluntary and Community Sector in Merton 2021, 2021). The increased demand for borough support during this period is likely due to the COVID-19 pandemic. In addition to funding from the council, Merton Connected also receives funding through community donations and fundraisers. It disburses these funds to other charitable organizations in the borough through initiatives such as Merton Giving (Merton Connected, 2021, “Merton Giving”).

Merton Connected puts a lot of energy into fostering community volunteering because it supports other forms of community and charitable work in Merton. They currently encourage community members to give their time to positively impact their local community (Merton Connected, 2021, “Volunteers”). These community members can achieve this positive impact by

engaging in the many forms of volunteer work that exist in Merton, including youth workers, library volunteering opportunities, neighborhood patrols, and volunteering with Wimbledon Guild (London Borough of Merton, 2024, “Volunteering Opportunities”). There is also more volunteer work at local charities in Merton, such as Age UK, Merton Mencap, and Merton Vision.

Merton Connected is working to improve its current employee volunteering programs. In the case of employee volunteering, they work with the Merton Council to facilitate employee volunteering in Merton by offering employees of the council to register with Merton Connected to engage in volunteer work. By encouraging these Merton Council employees to volunteer, they can contribute their specialized skills and time to local causes, which greatly benefit the community (Merton Connected, 2021, “Volunteers”). In 2022, 2,000 Merton Council employees registered with Merton Connected to engage in employee volunteering initiatives. The council gave those employees two days off to participate in employee volunteering; however, only two employees did, yielding a 0.1% participation among council employees (Beau Fadahunsi, Head of community development, funding advice, and volunteer services at Merton Connected, personal communication, January 25, 2024). Since the height of the pandemic, employee volunteering has dropped dramatically, and now, only a few employers offer employee volunteering. Merton Connected has partnered with Worcester Polytechnic Institute (WPI) to research these current employee volunteering schemes and suggest recommendations for improvement. For reference and further information about Merton Connected, one can refer to the sponsor description in Appendix E.

2.5 Employee Volunteering Schemes

This section gives an overview of employee volunteering schemes and the motivations behind the implementation of these schemes in companies and organizations. There is further discussion of corporate social responsibility and how these programs affect employee volunteering as well as the motivations of the individual. Finally, this section provides an overview of current practices of employee volunteering from charities and companies.

2.5.1 Corporate Social Responsibility and Implications

The concept of corporate social responsibility (CSR) is fundamental to understanding the development of employee volunteering schemes and the motivations behind corporate volunteerism. CSR is a business model that entails an actionable statement of a company's commitment to provide accountability, transparency, responsibility, and sustainability in response to current societal concerns to serve the community (Idow et al., 2014). The idea of corporate social responsibility is that the company should enact guidelines designed to address societal issues and encourage stakeholders to steer the company in a direction that is considered positive by employers, employees, and stakeholders (Thomas et al., 2013; Idow et al., 2014). In this regard, the stakeholders are anyone who can affect or will be affected by the company's decisions or actions, such as the employers, employees, shareholders, and customers (Fares et al., 2021). The company's business practices should align with the corporate social responsibility statements, which should ensure that the company is profitable, ethical, socially aware, and socially supportive. Furthermore, the development of CSR in companies is partly to serve stakeholders' interests (Idow et al., 2014).

Corporate social responsibility, when managed properly, can lead to a “win-win” scenario between the company and the parts of society that the company interacts with. As mentioned by Matten (2012), companies with CSR programs that are considered to genuinely and positively impact society are likely to be perceived as socially responsible and more attractive to potential employees. The value of the CSR program is interpreted by stakeholders in the company, as defined above, but is designed to show how the company can be a positive part of society. Prospective and current employees with personal views matching the CSR values of a company are more likely to want to work or to want to continue working at that company. While in some cases, CSR can be seen as a cynical route for the company to enhance its reputation and foster employee retention (Naatu et al., 2022), effectively and honestly executing CSR programs can provide the community tangible benefits.

CSR programs use different approaches to demonstrate the company's commitment to societal goals; an example is implementing employee volunteering schemes to promote engagement in community programs.

2.5.2 Employee Volunteering Schemes Overview

Employee volunteering, also called corporate volunteering, branches off of corporate social responsibility that benefits the company, the employees, and the community (Idow et al., 2014). Moreover, corporate volunteering promotes greater company involvement and commitment to and in the community (Idow et al., 2014; Cook et al., 2023). An employee donates their time to participate in an activity, like volunteering, that benefits society or their local community. For employee volunteering schemes, the employee volunteers are paid by the company for the time they spend volunteering (Cook et al., 2023; Idow et al., 2014). The company is likely to have a set number of hours or days set aside each year for employees to volunteer based on their employee volunteering scheme and CSR. Employee volunteers participate in a variety of activities, such as helping low-income families, charities, or participating in donation drives (Idow et al., 2014). For example, in the U.S., Verizon has an employee volunteering program with three main objectives: digital inclusion, climate protection, and human prosperity. The activities associated with these three objectives are, respectively, tutoring students online or helping older adults with technology, cleaning rivers or Zooniverse⁸ research, and writing letters to veterans or helping students with career questions.

In the past 13 years, starting in 2010, the UK government reduced expenditure and instead introduced “local financial self-sufficiency”. This change in practice has caused local councils to have to find new income and savings to make up for lost funding. Local councils, such as Woking Council, Croydon Council, Slough Council, and Birmingham Council, have declared bankruptcy due to financial stress from lack of funding. The lack of funding means that local councils must depend on “riskier” approaches to manage budgets, eventually leading to the council falling back on local residents through taxes or reducing services (Newcastle University, 2023). Figure 6 visualizes the budget for the voluntary sector and shows that the public is the largest source of funding as funding from the government has continued to decline (Tabassum, 2022).

⁸ Zooniverse is an online research platform that allows people to volunteer their time to participate in various research projects across fields (Zooniverse, n.d.).

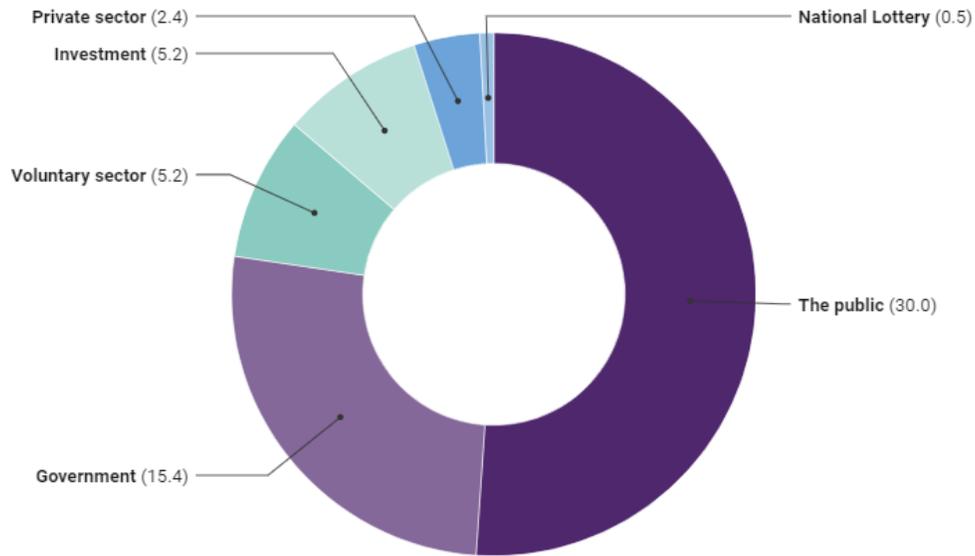


Figure 6: Breakdown of the Voluntary Sector Income by Source (2019-2020) (Tabassum, 2022).

Furthermore, it becomes evident that volunteering is a resource for local councils and community organizations to continue to run local services (Hanrahan, 2022). Employee volunteering could hugely benefit these organizations by making up for government funding cuts.

Successful employee volunteering schemes aim to benefit all participants, including the company, employees, community, and stakeholders. However, it is difficult to develop an employee volunteering scheme where all participants benefit equally. Therefore, the relationships between the company, the employee/volunteer, and the organization they are volunteering with are all equally important for an effective employee volunteering scheme (Cook et al., 2023; Reamon, 2016). Ideally, this is a “win-win-win” scenario between the corporation, the employees, and the volunteer organization.

2.5.3 Motivations of Employee Volunteering: Corporations and Employees

Employee volunteering schemes must consider the motivations of the company and the employees to encourage as much participation as possible. Failure to consider these aspects will likely decrease the effectiveness of the scheme.

The company's motivation to have corporate volunteering is similar to the company's motivation to have a CSR program. Overall, many studies, including Cook et al., 2023 and Seara

et al., 2023, have discussed how corporate volunteering may positively impact a company's 'attractiveness.' Companies with employee volunteering schemes that are based on the inherent satisfaction of participating in something meaningful will be viewed more positively by potential and current employees who can recognize the corporation's genuine social responsibility motivations (Seara et al., 2023). In turn, this can increase employee satisfaction and commitment, and aid employee retention and recruitment. It can also promote a positive work environment and reputation for the company in both an internal and external perspective (Cook et al., 2023; Seara et al., 2023).

The employees' motivations are arguably the most important aspect of an employee volunteering scheme. Without employee participation, the employee volunteering scheme is essentially nonexistent. Cook et al. (2023) examined case studies of employee engagement and experiences with employee volunteering schemes in the United Kingdom over the past decade. The authors identified three main themes that characterize employee motivations for participating: (1) connections between the employee and the community, (2) corporate citizenship, and (3) social enhancement apart from the company.

The study found that employees were more likely to participate in volunteering if they could personally connect to the community in some way, either by being a local resident or by empathizing with the community's situation. The research found that the motivations stemmed from the desire to help people in the community who the employees felt were worse off than themselves. Employees were more motivated to volunteer locally because their activities would have a direct and positive impact on their community. The notion that employees had to "make a difference" or "give back", as discussed by Cook et al. (2023), outweighed career or organizational benefits, which participants discussed as a by-product of personal motivations.

However, even if it was a secondary incentive, the motivation of employees to participate in corporate volunteering also stemmed from a sense of corporate citizenship. Employees wanted to help bolster a positive reputation for their company. Participants in the focus groups reviewed by Cook et al. (2023) discussed how their participation in employee volunteering was a way of coming to the defense of their company to refute negative publicity. In turn, employees felt that genuine values of helping the community drove employee volunteering. They could feel confident being part of a company intrinsically committed to the community — not for self-serving corporate gain (Cook et al., 2023).

Cook et al. (2023) discussed the reflections of the employees who participated in employee volunteering and gained further insight into their motivations to participate. Considering the reflections of the participants, employees were motivated by the idea of doing work that was new and gave immediate satisfaction. Employees who participated in employee volunteering felt that they had an opportunity to do something other than their corporate job and liked that they would see the effect of their work immediately. In their reflections, the participants even further discussed their personal motivations to help out a community that they empathize with. Finally, employee volunteers reflected on their motivation to participate based on the opportunity to be more involved in developing the scheme on the company side. Understanding how the reflections of the participants can motivate employees to volunteer again allows companies and host organizations to develop schemes that promote the retention of participants.

2.5.4 Employee Volunteering Schemes and Volunteer Managers

On the other side of employee volunteering schemes are the organizations with whom the corporation is collaborating. The volunteer managers are the ones from the charities that will organize and run the volunteering events on the receiving side of a corporate employee volunteering scheme. The interactions between the employees as volunteers and the volunteer managers will determine the need for the recruitment of more volunteers. This is because retention of volunteers depends on how employee volunteers reflect on their experience with the organization. Furthermore, as Reamon (2016) discusses, viewing volunteer power as a renewable resource suggests that if organizations use volunteer energy responsibly, then it becomes renewable and sustainable. Overuse or neglect of volunteers reduces volunteer participation and retention, which puts the volunteer organization in a perpetual state of recruiting volunteers (Reamon, 2016). Overall, in employee volunteering schemes, how volunteer managers from the host organization interact with the employees can be a deciding factor in the scheme's effectiveness as a benefactor to the organization.

The role of the volunteer organization is to increase the effectiveness of the employee volunteering scheme to benefit their organization by understanding and meeting the motivations and expectations of the employees (Haski-Leventhal & Cnaan, 2009; Cook et al., 2023; Reamon, 2016). In turn, employees will be able to connect to their role in the overall impact and gain a

sense of fulfillment and satisfaction, benefiting both themselves and the company they work for (Cook et al., 2023; Reamon, 2016). Again, when all participating parties benefit, the overall effectiveness and participation increase (Cook et al., 2023; Thomas et al., 2013; Idow et al., 2014).

2.5.5 Current Practices of Employee Volunteering Schemes

There are limited data on companies with effective employee volunteering schemes, but two sources were able to provide some insight on the subject: Fortune magazine and TwentyNow, which is a news site with a focus on sustainability. Each provided a list of what the source considered to be top employee volunteering schemes. The lists were cross-referenced against each other to determine what companies were considered to have significant volunteering programs. Fortune created a list of the fifty best companies in the U.S. for their contributions to the community. Companies were asked to distribute a survey to their employees regarding corporate social responsibility along with benefits and results of related programs. Fortune then ranked the companies based on employee responses from the surveys and other factors such as if the company offers paid time off, has employee matching funds, and their total philanthropic donations (Fortune Editors, 2017). TwentyNow identified exemplary volunteering programs by considering factors that make the scheme a “win-win-win” experience (Perrone, 2021). The identified factors contributing to a company ‘win’ include creating employee engagement, motivating and retaining employees, and making a positive impact. Factors contributing to an employee ‘win’ include giving a sense of purpose, connecting with a community, and networking. Factors contributing to a community ‘win’ include building capacity, avoiding costs, and addressing resource limitations (Perrone, 2021). Two companies that were singled out for their exemplary efforts to ‘give back’ were Salesforce and Patagonia (Perrone, 2021; Fortune Editors, 2017). However, because there are no official standards to measure the effectiveness of employee volunteering schemes, this review can be considered a case study of current practices that have a basis in the topics mentioned above.

For example, Salesforce is an international company that works in the information technology industry with headquarters in San Francisco. Their total philanthropic donations in 2017 were \$137,000,000 (Fortune Editors, 2017). Salesforce’s volunteering programs vary from volunteering in a soup kitchen, working at a children’s hospital in Morocco, or volunteering at

schools. Salesforce has integrated philanthropy and “doing good” into their company CSR plan since adopting the 1-1-1 model in 1999 (1% of product, equity, and employee time to philanthropy) (*Employee Volunteering & Giving*, n.d.; Fee, 2021). The company actively encourages and makes it easy for employees to take time off work to volunteer with a program that is “personal” to them. The way that Salesforce has set up its employee volunteering scheme reflects suggestions that personal motivation makes employee volunteering schemes more effective (Cook et al., 2023).

As another comparison, Patagonia is an international company in retail with its headquarters located in Ventura, California. Their total philanthropic donations were \$7.9 million in 2017 (Fortune Editors, 2017). Patagonia’s volunteering scheme is focused specifically on environmental impact, which is also emphasized in the company’s CSR page as a core value (*Corporate Social Responsibility - Patagonia*, n.d.). This included employees restoring a sheep ranch in Chile that will become a new national park and an annual 5k community fun run that benefits local environmental nonprofits. Employees mentioned that they benefited from being part of a company that consistently acts on Patagonia's values for environmental and community outreach (Fortune Editors, 2017). This employee volunteering scheme benefits the company through reputation and employee retention, benefits the employee through work satisfaction and pride, and benefits the host organization through the work done (Perrone, 2021; Cook et al., 2023).

For host organizations, there is limited data about which charities are performing particularly well in regard to employee volunteering. We reviewed the Forbes magazine *America’s Top 100 Charities* and identified two charities, Habitat for Humanity International and the YMCA of the USA, that are especially active in hosting volunteers from employer volunteer programs.

Habitat for Humanity International is a nonprofit that aims to help families build homes in an affordable way. There is a page on the charity’s website specifically for employees volunteering under group opportunities called business partners (*Business Partners | Habitat for Humanity*, n.d.). This page emphasizes how businesses can benefit from participating in employee volunteering in general and, specifically, how companies can benefit from volunteering with Habitat for Humanity. The general benefits mentioned include emphasizing a “fun, easy, and engaging experience”, and research suggests “employees prefer to work for

companies invested in charitable causes” (*Business Partners / Habitat for Humanity*, n.d.). Specifically, the page demonstrates how volunteering with Habitat for Humanity will create a deeper connection between the community and the company as well as allow volunteers to help make a more stable environment for those in need (*Business Partners / Habitat for Humanity*, n.d.). Habitat for Humanity aims to make the reader empathize with the cause as well as motivate them to participate by considering the benefits in order to attract more employee volunteers.

The YMCA of the USA is a nonprofit “committed to strengthening community by empowering young people, improving the health and well-being of people of all ages and inspiring action in and across communities” (*Who We Are*, n.d.). The YMCA North (North Eastern Region of the United States) website has a page dedicated to corporate volunteering opportunities that starts off with the benefits of volunteering from research, which is also similar to Habitat for Humanity’s volunteering page. The first sentence on the page aims to motivate company participation in employee volunteering and says, “Studies show 51 percent of job candidates state they will not work for an organization that does not provide employee volunteering opportunities” (*Corporate and Group Volunteer Opportunities*, n.d.). The rest of the page goes into detail about the multiple ways volunteers can support the community by participating.

The employee volunteering schemes discussed in this background section are relevant to Merton Connected as it gives insight into how employees generally spend their volunteer time. While there is extensive research about the value of employee volunteering schemes to employees, employers, and the community, there is a lack of information on exemplary employer schemes and how to promote volunteering. There is currently limited knowledge about the types, trends, and impacts of employer volunteering schemes in general and especially in the London Borough of Merton. Therefore, Merton Connected sought the help of students from Worcester Polytechnic Institute (WPI) to research the area further and provide recommendations to encourage more employer schemes and more employees to volunteer.

3.0 Methodology

The goal of this project was to evaluate the existing employee volunteering schemes in the London Borough of Merton and recommend ways for Merton Connected to enhance and encourage more participation in these programs among employees and employers. We achieved this goal through three main objectives.

- **Objective 1:** Assess the impact of employee volunteering schemes in Merton.
- **Objective 2:** Evaluate current and best practices in employee volunteering schemes.
- **Objective 3:** Recommend how Merton Connected can help foster and improve employee volunteering schemes in Merton.

In addition to the background research we have done, we conducted interviews with stakeholders and delivered a survey to employees in Merton. Figure 7 shows the major tasks associated with each listed objective. We accomplished our project goal and objectives during our time in London in March and April of 2024. We collected necessary data and compiled our deliverables which included this comprehensive research report, an executive summary for stakeholders, and a final presentation summarizing findings and recommendations.

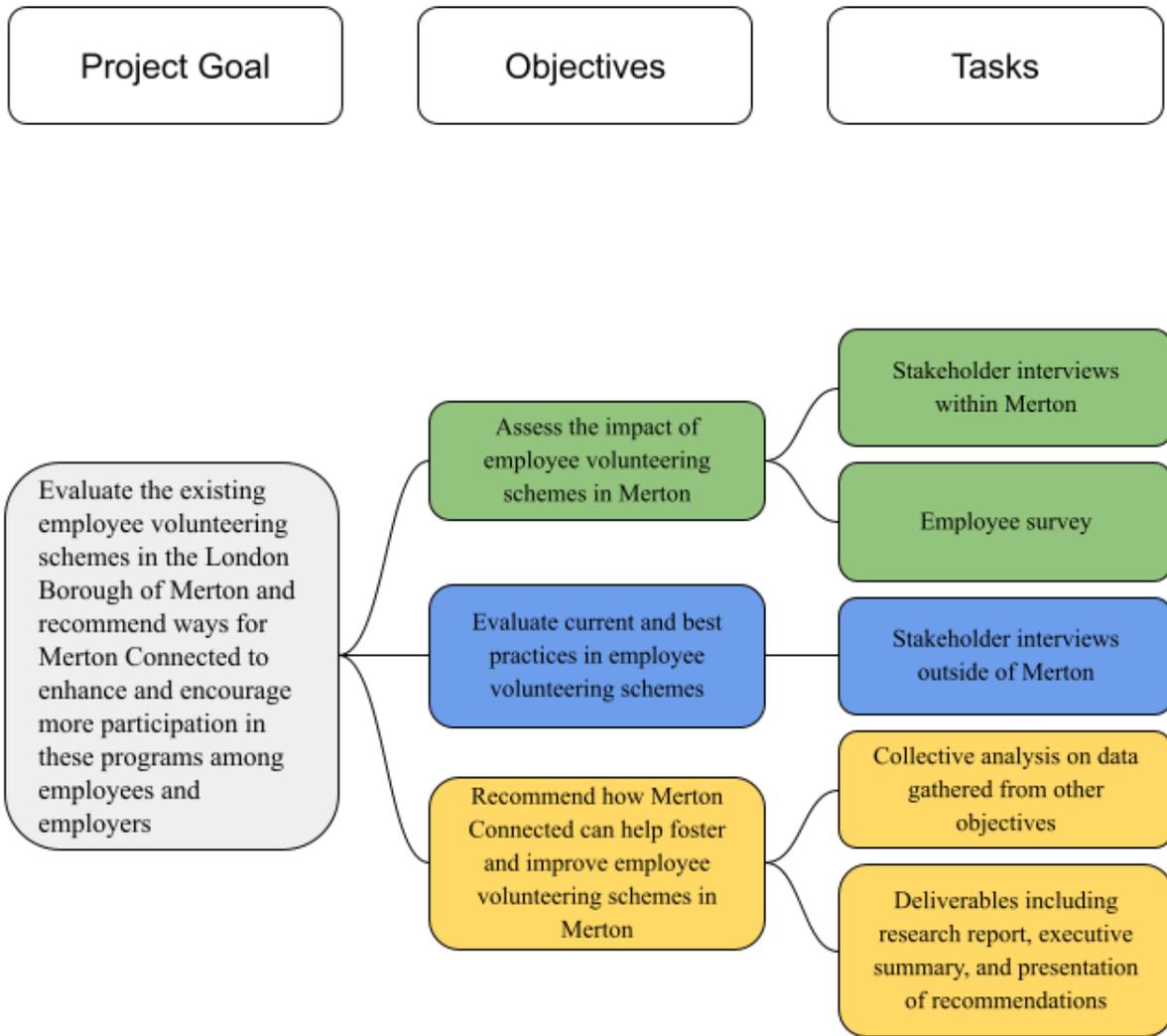


Figure 7: Project Goal, Objectives, and Related Tasks

3.1 Assess the Impact of Employee Volunteering Schemes in Merton

Our first objective was to assess employee volunteering schemes in Merton to understand the current situation. We did this in two ways: (1) conducting stakeholder interviews in Merton and (2) surveying employees in Merton to obtain feedback and assess their experiences.

3.1.1 Stakeholder Interviews in Merton

To begin assessing employee volunteering schemes in Merton, we conducted stakeholder interviews. We contacted representatives of three stakeholder groups, including staff from Merton Connected, local employers, and host VCSE organizations. While identifying stakeholders, we developed three interview scripts tailored specifically to each category of stakeholder and conducted the interviews with the stakeholders we identified and contacted.

3.1.1.1 Identify Stakeholders

The primary stakeholder for this project was Merton Connected, as the research goal was to recommend how Merton Connected might improve employee volunteering schemes in the borough. Merton Connected provided us with a list of individuals and organizations with whom they had associations, including businesses, non-profits, the local authority, and other local statutory agencies. These stakeholders were categorized into two groups, namely employers and host VCSE organizations. A list of contacts and those who we spoke with in interviews can be seen in more detail in Appendix A.

Employers enable their employees to volunteer through various employee volunteering schemes. With the help of Merton Connected, volunteering employees are dispersed to VCSE organizations where they can carry out volunteer duties. These employers were identified using a second provided list of businesses associated with Merton Connected. The expansive lists of stakeholders Merton Connected provided included organizations such as the Metropolitan Police Service, Merton Vision, and Age UK.

In order to further identify stakeholders, in our interviews we asked the interviewee to suggest other organizations and companies that we might find useful to interview, and, through this, we developed a referral system for our interview sample. We asked employers which VCSEs their employees volunteered with and asked VCSEs which employers provided them

with volunteers. This process further identified businesses and VCSEs in Merton that could be interviewed as stakeholders.

3.1.1.2 Develop Interview Scripts

We developed different interview scripts for each of our stakeholder categories: Merton Connected, employers, and VCSEs. In the interview with leaders of Merton Connected, our goal was to understand what experience they had with facilitating employee volunteers as a third party. Some of the topics we covered in the interview with Merton Connected included which VCSEs they worked with, the businesses they worked with, what did or did not work well for them as a third-party organization, and how their engagement with employers changed over time. We also gathered basic information about the employee volunteer schemes in Merton, including the types of programs, number of participants, and more. The interview script with Merton Connected is outlined more specifically in Appendix B.

In the interviews with employers identified in section 3.1.1.1, we aimed to understand their current employee volunteering scheme and how it was implemented through Merton Connected and other VCSE organizations in the borough. We interviewed representatives from the stakeholder organizations who had a deep knowledge of the employee volunteer program. They were primarily managers or primary decision-makers involved with employee volunteering schemes. These interviews included questions (see interview script in Appendix C) that were intended to deliver an understanding of how their employee volunteering schemes had encouraged or discouraged employees from participating, the successes and challenges of the schemes, and how retention of volunteering was supported or unsupported by the structure of the schemes.

In the interviews with VCSEs, identified in section 3.1.1.1, we spoke with representatives of the organizations that worked directly with the management of employee volunteers. The interviews included a bank of questions (see interview script in Appendix D) that intended to reveal more details about the impacts of different volunteering schemes on employees and the local community, as well as the effectiveness of different approaches to encourage volunteer participation and retention.

3.1.1.3 Conduct Interviews

We conducted interviews that were approximately 30 minutes long. These were either in-person or remote depending on the interviewee's preference, but the majority preferred online meetings so our most common mediums were Zoom and Microsoft Teams. We began each interview with a preamble that explained the nature of the research, solicited consent to record and quote, and indicated that we gave interviewees the right to review any materials we used from the interview prior to publication (see Appendices B, C, and D). One team member acted as the lead for questions while the remaining two took notes. However, note-takers were encouraged to ask questions as they came up. We tailored the questions to match the expertise and experiences of the interviewee and achieved an overall flow in the conversation. We interviewed 1 representative of Merton Connected, 3 representatives of employers, and eight representatives of other host VCSEs inside of Merton.

For data analysis on interview responses, we developed a profile for each interviewee based on their background, experience, and opinions, specifically in their own words, whenever it was possible. After developing a profile for each interviewee, we used the profiles for comparative analysis between interviewees to determine points of commonality or dissent among participants. We categorized responses under different themes, such as interviewee views on employee motivations for volunteering, participation, and retention rates, and the role of incentives, such as paid time to volunteer. We collated the responses from the data analysis to understand what was currently being done in employee volunteering in Merton and how it was effective or ineffective.

3.1.2 Employee Volunteering Experience Assessment Surveys

This survey was intended to help us understand volunteers' experiences and the reasons behind employees' decisions to participate or not participate in volunteering activities. We asked representatives of Merton employers whom we interviewed if they were willing to distribute an anonymous online survey to their employees on our behalf.

We constructed our survey using the Qualtrics platform, and our questions are presented in Appendix E. The survey addressed several topics, including (but not limited to) how often employees have volunteered through their employee scheme, what value and experiences they get from volunteering, and how employers might encourage more employees to volunteer.

When distributing the survey, we provided willing employers with a cover email containing a link to the online survey for distribution to employees. The email and preamble at the beginning of the instrument explained the purpose of the research and that the survey was anonymous and participants had a right to refuse to answer any question or withdraw at any time. We monitored responses and asked the employer representative to send a reminder email after one week. We developed the survey using Qualtrics for easy online distribution and semi-automated data collection and analysis. We also created a list of the most commonly stated responses for each question, such as perceived benefits, motivations for volunteering, and drawbacks and challenges. We used these responses and any correlation we found to contribute to stakeholder interviews as well.

3.2 Evaluate Current and Best Practices in Employee Volunteering Schemes

Our second objective was similar to Objective 1 but focused on stakeholders outside of Merton with a few key differences. This objective included identifying and evaluating current and best practices in employee volunteering schemes outside Merton. There are benefits to exploring and monitoring other employee volunteering programs beyond Merton, such as in the London Boroughs of Camden or Croydon, where they have particularly strong employee volunteering programs (Beau Fadahunsi, personal communication, January 25, 2024). We interviewed stakeholders to identify the practices and schemes in place that are particularly effective. We asked questions to identify what factors contribute to successful volunteer programs and how to achieve them.

3.2.1 Stakeholder Interviews Outside of Merton

Following the approach in 3.1.1.1, we identified three stakeholder groups including third-party organizations (similar to Merton Connected), employers, and host VCSE organizations outside of Merton (see Appendix A).

3.2.1.1 Identify Stakeholders

We identified third-party organizations outside of Merton initially based on recommendations from our project hosts at Merton Connected. We chose organizations that play

similar roles in the community as Merton Connected, including Works4U, Groundworks, and HandsOn London.

We identified employer and VCSE stakeholders outside of Merton using a similar approach as discussed in section 3.1.1.1 regarding factors such as the referral sample. However, since Merton Connected has strong connections mostly just with organizations within Merton, they were not able to provide an extensive list in this scenario. Of the stakeholders we contacted outside of Merton, many were unaware of Merton Connected's efforts and had few, if any, previous interactions. Our means of contact included sending various emails in order to identify the correct people within the organization to speak to, attending conferences where outside parties were present so we could speak in person, and calling representatives via phone.

3.2.1.2 Develop Interview Scripts

Following the approach described in Objective 1, we developed interview scripts for each stakeholder category (see Appendices B, C, and D). The areas of focus for the stakeholder groups inside and outside Merton are very similar, and we were able to use the same scripts previously generated.

3.2.1.3 Conduct Interviews

We conducted interviews outside of Merton (see Appendix A) and analyzed the data on current and best practices in employee volunteering schemes using the same process outlined in section 3.1.1.3. We interviewed three representatives of third-party organizations similar to Merton Connected, three representatives of employers, and two representatives of other host VCSEs outside of Merton. The responses from these interviews gave us a sense as to which schemes are particularly effective and which ones are not.

3.3 Recommend How Merton Connected Can Help Foster and Improve Employee Volunteering Schemes in Merton

Our final objective was to identify and recommend areas of improvement and new collaborative opportunities for Merton Connected. We used the responses and data from stakeholder interviews inside and outside of Merton, employee surveys, background research, and literature reviews to recommend ways that Merton Connected can help foster and improve

employee volunteering schemes in Merton to increase their reach and impact. We discuss our findings, conclusions, and recommendations in the following sections.

4.0 Findings

This section reviews the data collected from interviews with third-party organizations, employers, and host VCSEs from both inside and outside of Merton. Appendix A details all the stakeholders that we interviewed. We summarized the data and the findings from the survey we sent to employees and discussed common responses among interviewee survey responses.

Common interview responses about employee volunteering across all the stakeholder interviews were determined based on what interviewees said in response to questions presented in Appendices B, C, and D for third-party organizations, employers, and VCSEs, respectively. We delivered our survey to employees of Merton employers and in total received 54 complete responses, where 51 came from the Merton Council and 3 came from Domestic and General. These data were used to create the graphs found in the upcoming sections.

Several common themes were discussed across all stakeholder groups and these included motivations for participating in employee volunteering, barriers that prevented participation in employee volunteering, incentives for companies to offer employee volunteering, the promotion of volunteering opportunities by all stakeholders, patterns in employees likely to volunteer, employee feedback, and types of employee volunteering schemes. From these common themes, we were also able to identify specific benefits and challenges stakeholders experience. We found various points of agreement among interviewees when discussing these topics, as well as some contradictory and unique responses. The data from survey responses also supplements the topics discussed in stakeholder interviews.

4.1 Employee Motivations for Participation

Overall, we found a consensus on the primary motivators for employee volunteering that was discussed by most of the interviewees. One of the most common motivators for employees to volunteer was that volunteering allowed employees to do something different than their day job and to use their skill set for a different application. This motivator was stated by representatives from Age UK Merton, Bank of America, Domestic & General, Works4U, Groundwork, Merton Connected, Merton Vision, and Wimbledon Guild. As seen in Figure 8, this was also the most common answer stated in the survey distributed to the Merton Council, in which 72% of the respondents said they were motivated to volunteer for training and skill

development. Discussing this motivation for participating in employee volunteering also generally led to topics such as Curriculum Vitae (CV) enhancement and professional development as a secondary motivator. This entails using current skills for a new application or developing skills, through volunteering, that might be added to a resume.

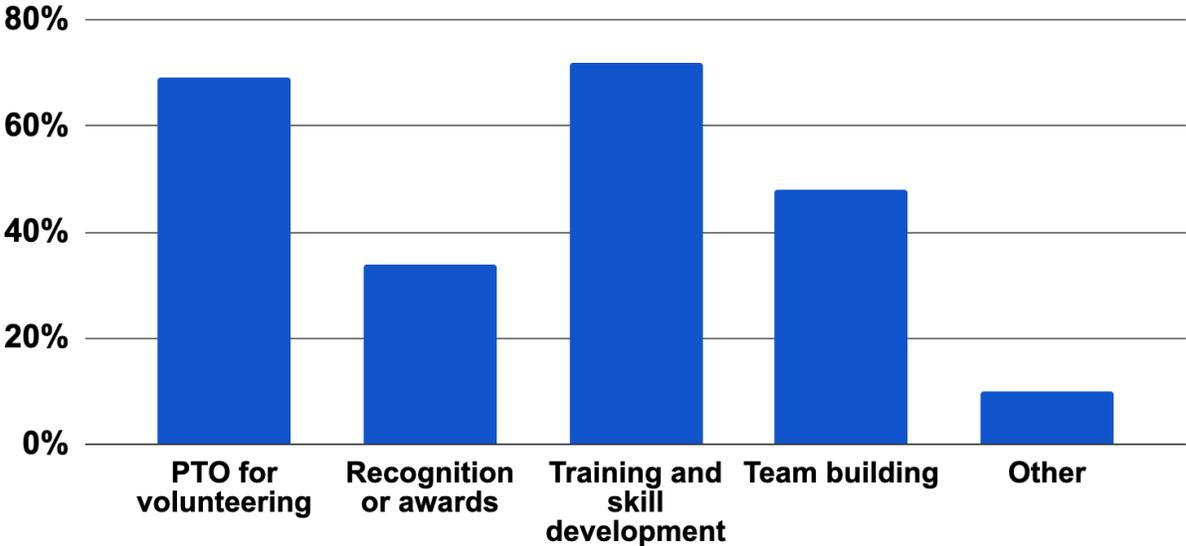


Figure 8: Employee Survey Motivators and Benefits of Volunteering (Multiple Selection Response)⁹

Another common motivator for employee volunteers was the opportunity to do something good or make a positive impact. This reason was stated by representatives from Bank of America, Domestic & General, Works4U, Merton Connected, Merton Council, and OSI Systems. We also often discussed how corporate social responsibility programs in companies are a motivator for more than just engaging in volunteering, but also recruiting and retaining employees. Employees not only feel good about the impact they are making but also feel good about working for a company that has volunteer opportunities built into their values. The stakeholders we spoke to were largely in agreement about the motivations of employees to volunteer and there were no contradictory responses.

⁹ PTO in the figure refers to Paid Time Off

4.2 Employee Barriers to Participation

From interview responses, we found that the most prominent barrier that prevents employees from participating in employee volunteering schemes is time. Almost every representative we spoke to pointed out that limited time was a major reason why employees were unable to participate. Most stakeholders said that employees feel like they do not have the time to take a full day off to volunteer considering the pressure they are under from tasks in their daily jobs. Employees feel like they would not be able to catch up on the work they missed if they took the time to volunteer. In an interview with Bank of America, Jack Doyle, the Vice President Corporate Social Responsibility Manager, stated that 20% to 25% of employees will never participate in their employee volunteering scheme because they believe they do not have time or are not interested (J. Doyle, personal communication, April 3, 2024). This restriction is also reinforced in our survey findings (Figure 9), with 31% of respondents indicating that lack of time limits them from volunteering. This barrier also relates to the initiation of volunteering being a lengthy process as some host voluntary organizations require training and background checks to volunteer. This point was also raised by host VCSEs.

Another common barrier to employee participation in employee volunteering schemes was a lack of awareness, promotion, and information on all sides (i.e., employers, host VCSEs, and third-party organizations). In an interview with Education and Employers, we discussed how to get all the employees, especially at big companies, to know about the possible volunteering opportunities given the barrage of other information they receive on a daily basis. Mitus Castillo, the Partnerships Manager from Education and Employers, mentioned that even after partnering with a company for over 10 years there are still employees who do not know about the opportunities they have to volunteer with Education and Employers (M. Castillo, personal communication, April 10, 2024). Reinforcing this idea, we found that 40% of survey respondents indicated that lack of information is a barrier to volunteering, as shown in Figure 9.

A unique barrier that prevented employees from participating in employee volunteering was COVID-19, which we discussed with Commonsense Community Development Trust in Merton. Naomi Martin (Director) mentioned that previous volunteers were worried about coming back to volunteer after the pandemic due to safety concerns (N. Martin, personal communication, April 2, 2024).

Employees in Merton highlighted the limited range of organizations for whom employees can volunteer was another barrier. In response to our survey, Merton Council employees indicated that they are only able to use their volunteer hours to volunteer within Merton, while many would like to volunteer in organizations outside of the borough. In some cases, employees forgo their paid volunteer hours to volunteer at organizations of their own choice on their own time. Overall, this point is reinforced by survey data in Figure 9 which shows 26% of respondents indicated that one of the reasons they may not participate in their employee volunteering scheme is because they are not interested in the available opportunities.

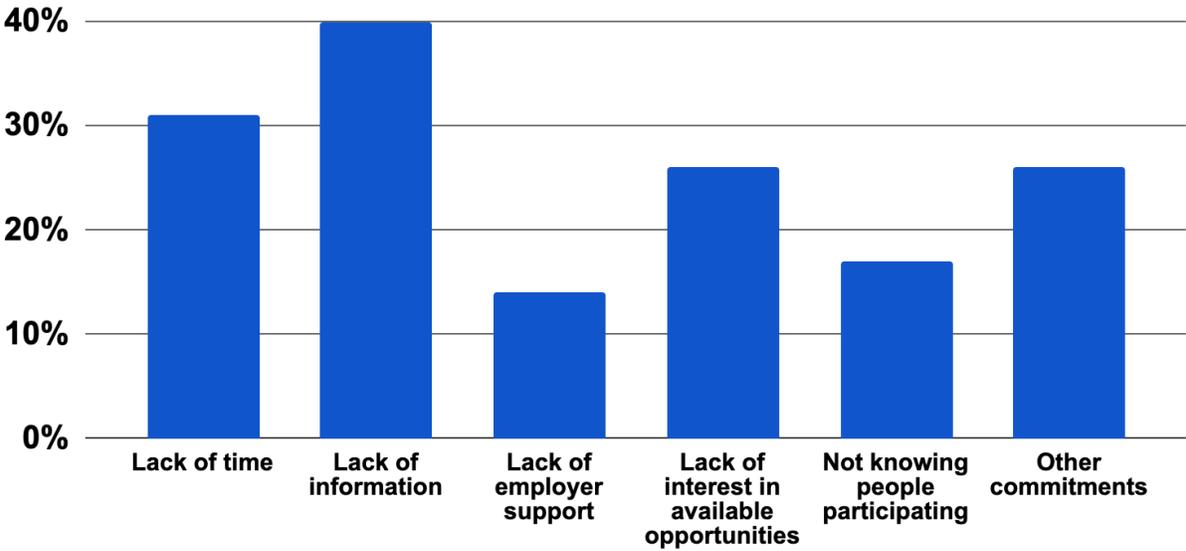


Figure 9: Employee Survey Barriers to Volunteer (Multiple Selection Answer)

4.3 Number of Employee Volunteers

Most of the VCSE representatives we spoke to saw an increased number of employee volunteers during COVID-19 because employees wanted to help out and strengthen their local community during a challenging time. These numbers, however, have since declined and are failing to return to pre-pandemic levels. None of the VCSEs in Merton that we interviewed indicated that they had an ample number of employee volunteers. Most, such as Tooting and Mitcham Sports Club and Volunteer Centre Sutton, indicated that they occasionally received some employee volunteers, but it was never a large number (J. Watkins, personal communication, April 3, 2024; N. Blok, personal communication, April 17, 2024). A couple of VCSEs, such as South Mitcham Community Center and Age UK, said that they had no employee volunteers at the time that we interviewed them (S. Grand, personal communication, April 3, 2024; K. Rodda, personal communication, April 9, 2024). Our survey found that 87% of respondents were aware that their employer had employee volunteering opportunities in Merton, but only 13% of them had participated in the scheme.

Although the exact reasons for this decline in employee volunteers are difficult to determine, representatives at the VCSEs believe that the transition period from the height of the pandemic to the post-pandemic era caused a shift in employees' personal and professional lives (S. Grand, personal communication, April 3, 2024). Changing responsibilities at work, such as transitioning from remote or hybrid work to fully in-person, or at home, such as changes with childcare arrangements, have meant that employees need time to get settled, thus decreasing the amount of time and energy they have to volunteer. Other reasons that VCSEs gave for a decline in employee volunteering levels include volunteer burnout from increased levels of volunteering during the pandemic, lingering health concerns, and financial challenges in the current economic climate.

However, even before the pandemic, VCSEs and employers, such as the Merton Council, indicated that the number of employee volunteers had room for improvement. Employers told us that there were problems with getting employees to volunteer and VCSEs told us that there were difficulties organizing and getting enough employees to volunteer.

Surprisingly, other employers stated the opposite: they had decreased levels of employee volunteering participation during the pandemic and had achieved pre-pandemic levels of volunteering in the post-pandemic era. For instance, Domestic and General recently implemented

an employee volunteering scheme in the post-pandemic era and have been very successful in attracting large percentages of their employees to volunteer. They have been so successful that they have even received awards for their efforts (C. Taylor & H. Percival, personal communication, April 5, 2024). Longer standing programs, such as that at Bank of America, experienced a reduction in employee volunteer participation during the pandemic, declining from about 30% to 15% by year (J. Doyle, personal communication, April 3, 2024). They have since recovered and are back to pre-pandemic levels of participation, which is something that other employers, such as the Merton Council, and other VCSEs are struggling to reach. The contradiction in these findings could be in part that Merton has few large companies in the borough. Larger companies are generally the biggest contributors of employee volunteers elsewhere as they have more resources to have strong employee volunteering schemes. These companies presumably have better methods of promoting volunteer activities, which other VCSEs and employers struggle with. We found that this is a major issue in getting adequate numbers of employees to volunteer, which is further discussed in sections 4.7 and 4.8.

Another reason that we found for the decline in employee volunteering is that VCSEs struggle to organize employee volunteering activities by themselves. As part of our original project plan, we hoped to engage in employee volunteering activities to better understand the current environment of employee volunteering. Unfortunately, we were unable to participate in any volunteer activities since none were offered during our time in Merton or they required notice far in advance. This situation arose because of the large efforts of planning and funding required. In our interview with Age UK, the volunteering manager, Kourtney Rodda, said that they only hold volunteering activities quarterly because they require a lot of planning and funding, especially if the employer has a small funding budget (K. Rodda, personal communication, April 9, 2024). This extra planning and funding is required to coordinate larger groups of specialized participants from employers as opposed to small groups and individual volunteering efforts. Austerity measures certainly do not help combat this issue, since a lot of these VCSEs have reduced funding due to these policies.

Lastly, in our interview with the South Mitcham Community Center, the grants and operations manager, Sarah Grand, stated that another significant barrier to getting adequate numbers of employee volunteers is because many VCSEs are located far from large companies (S. Grand, personal communication, April 3, 2024). In our interview with Jack Doyle, who

focuses on volunteering, philanthropy, and social impact at Bank of America's UK division, he stated that employees prefer volunteering activities that are close to where they work since a lot of employers do not offer travel reimbursements (J. Doyle, personal communication, April 3, 2024). This preference makes it hard for VCSEs in boroughs with few large employers to get employee volunteers.

4.4 Patterns Among Employees Likely to Volunteer

Although there was no specific demographic or type of employee that was more likely to volunteer, some patterns emerged. Several employers, VCSEs, and third-party organizations indicated they have seen a variety of employees by seniority and status (i.e., full vs. part-time) who participate in employee volunteering. Representatives from Bank of America, Education and Employers, and Groundwork, however, indicated that senior-level employees were less likely to volunteer because of time constraints. Dominic Pinkney, CEO of Works4U, noted that if a senior level or managerial employee were active in the employee volunteering schemes, then the program tends to be stronger as more employees are likely to participate (D. Pinkney, personal communication, April 12, 2024).

Dominic Pinkney also noted that younger employees who are in their 20s or 30s are more likely to participate in employee volunteering schemes compared to older employees (D. Pinkney, personal communication, April 12, 2024). In general, younger employees expect businesses to offer employee volunteering opportunities while older employees have less interest and lower expectations on this front. Other stakeholders did not specifically recognize any patterns in the age of employees who participated in employee volunteering schemes.

The representative of Bank of America emphasized that once an employee volunteers they are more likely to do it again (J. Doyle, personal communication, April 3, 2024). This was supported by our survey data as all employees who had participated previously indicated they were likely to participate again, while of the employees who had not participated, 37% indicated it was not likely that they would participate in the future. In contrast to this, some VCSEs found that it was difficult to get employees to volunteer with them again as they may not volunteer again or desire to seek alternative volunteering opportunities.

4.5 Employer Incentives to Enact Volunteer Programs

Several interviewees emphasized the reasons employers enact volunteer programs. During our interviews, third-party organizations and VCSEs, such as HandsOn London, Education and Employers, and the Wimbledon Guild, mentioned corporate social responsibility (CSR) as an incentive for the development of employee volunteering schemes within companies. This comports with our background research (Idow et al., 2014; Cook et al., 2023; Seara et al., 2023).

Furthermore, in speaking with employers outside of Merton, such as Bank of America and OSI Systems, as well as employers inside of Merton, such as the Merton Council and Domestic & General, we discovered that they see various corporate benefits to the promotion of employee volunteering schemes. Chloe Taylor (Marketing and Content Executive) and Hadley Percival (Marketing Manager) from Domestic & General highlighted that employee volunteering improves employee well-being and motivates employees to be more committed at work because they feel as though they are part of a company that cares (C. Taylor & H. Percival, personal communication, April 5, 2024). Dominic Pinkney from Works4U and Keith Burns from the Merton Council also agreed on this point (K. Burns, personal communication, March 19, 2024; D. Pinkney, personal communication, April 12, 2024).

In additional attempts to enhance the workplace experience, volunteering provides opportunities for team building. Oftentimes companies will try to set up group volunteering days to allow employees who work together to develop better relationships that might lead to greater employee satisfaction and increased productivity.

Another incentive for employers to offer employee volunteering schemes is that volunteering is attractive to current and prospective employees and may enhance employee recruitment and retention. This was discussed by representatives from employers like Domestic & General and Merton Council as well as third-party organizations like Works4U and HandsOn.

4.6 Types of Employee Volunteering Schemes

In the interviews of stakeholders both in and outside of Merton, we asked what kind of employee volunteering scheme they had if they were a company or what was the most common employee volunteering scheme they encountered if they were a third-party organization or a host

VCSE. There was a wide range of responses among employers. Some employers admit they have no scheme or a new scheme that has not picked up much activity. However, more established schemes include giving paid time to volunteer for a set amount of time per year or unlimited at the discretion of managers. Most employers allow full days off while some allow the hours to be split up for more flexible use.

For example, the UK offices of Bank of America have an employee volunteering scheme that does not limit the time allowed to volunteer on paid time as long as it is a reasonable request approved by the employee's manager. Jack Doyle, Vice President Corporate Social Responsibility Manager at Bank of America, mentioned that they have a 30% participation rate of employee volunteers through their scheme and have a wide spectrum of individual or team-based volunteering opportunities (J. Doyle, personal communication, April 3, 2024). Similarly, Domestic & General, an employer in Merton, runs their employee volunteering scheme through an app called On Hand where employees can complete "missions" and a tree is planted for every mission completed to support the company's efforts in sustainability. There is a lot of flexibility with this program as team, individual, and personalized missions can be added. Domestic & General has about 600 total employees in the UK with 448 volunteers on the On Hand volunteering platform and 2,987 missions completed since the roll-out of the scheme in 2022 (C. Taylor & H. Percival, personal communication, April 5, 2024). BNY Mellon, an employer outside of Merton, has an employee volunteering program that gives paid time for employees to volunteer three days out of the year, totaling at 24 hours that can be split up as desired (C. Davenport, personal communication, April 12, 2024).

Another example of a common employee volunteering scheme was one in which employees are given two days of paid time per year to volunteer. This tends to be a one-off situation for a full day of volunteering by an individual or a group of employees such as is encountered by third-party organizations like Groundwork or host VCSEs like Merton Vision and Wimbledon Guild. Employers that give two working days of paid time to volunteer were the Merton Council and OSI Systems. The Merton Council has 2,000 employees (5,000 including school employees) but had only two employees register their employee volunteering days in 2022-23. Merton Council representatives mentioned that while there were only two individuals that recorded volunteering days, they cannot account for anyone who may have volunteered but did not use the council's volunteering system. After speaking with Sarah Rayner, the Benefits

and Compensation Manager EMEA at OSI Systems, we found that of their 625 employees, there were seven employees that participated in volunteering through their employee volunteering scheme, which was recently reintroduced with two days per year to volunteer on paid time (S. Rayner, personal communication, April 5, 2024).

When speaking about other global offices with Jack Doyle, we discovered that law firms provide a tremendous amount of pro bono services as part of employee volunteering, and it is normal for them to share their skills through volunteering. However, this scenario is only applicable to larger law firms and no other industry has this level of volunteering expectations. We also discussed employee volunteering schemes taking effect through volunteering events with very large numbers (i.e., 40-50) employees in attendance. The majority of an organization may take time to volunteer in an event acting as a potential social event for the company to show appreciation to the community and build relationships with others from their company with whom they may not be in daily contact. These often included senior ranking employees and managers taking a lead and, in some cases, it inflated a company's volunteer participation statistics if they have a small number of total employees (J. Doyle, personal communication, April 3, 2024).

4.7 Promotion of Employee Volunteering Scheme from Employer to Employees

Promotion of volunteering opportunities to an employee varies from company to company and depends on the age of the scheme. Companies such as Bank of America and Domestic and General have sound methods of promotion that have yielded good results over their many years of operation. Conversely, companies like OSI Systems, who have recently begun their scheme in the past year, believe promotion of opportunities is one of the most important things to improve. One of the most common methods of promotion by a company is simply through email and company newsletter or website. While these mechanisms are efficient in distributing information, they are not effective in getting the audience to read the information.

The average worker at Bank of America can receive over 150 emails a day and may not have time to read every general email from a mailing list. To improve the effectiveness of email promotion, direct involvement of management could be used as the employee is much more

likely to read the email if a co-worker or manager has their name on it and the email is specifically addressed to them. This approach applies to in-person communication as well. If someone recognizable is delivering information, it is easier to receive and be understood. In addition, if a peer or manager specifically asks something to be done, the employee is much more likely to do it. This specific way of communicating also allows people to be targeted by their skills and adds another level of personalization. On the same topic, if other local co-workers are volunteering, nearby employees may participate in order to keep up with them.

Bank of America promotes volunteering by using office wall space to display volunteering opportunities and highlight success stories. The company found that hearing other successful stories of volunteering and seeing the impacts was a motivator for other employees to volunteer.

4.8 Promotion of Opportunity Between VCSEs and Companies

We have encountered a few modes of communication between the VCSE and companies. The most prominent is direct communication. Companies, VCSEs, and sometimes employees from companies will reach out by phone, email, or social media messages to advertise and set up a volunteer event. This has proven to be successful every so often, but it takes a lot of time and planning and adds to the workload of the individuals responsible. VCSEs also have experienced communication falling off after putting in considerable time and effort.

Another strategy includes using online fora and matching services involving third-parties to simplify the process. Organizations have found that planning events well in the future and being able to provide a set calendar is much more successful than trying to form spontaneous plans. On the VCSE end, a lot of planning is required to organize an event, especially for groups. This responsibility most likely falls on a single individual at the organization. To help alleviate this burden, third-parties such as Merton Connected are sought out to facilitate the connection. Third-parties have their own ways of matching and in some cases use software, such as Simply Connect, to allow for posting and browsing of volunteer opportunities.

Finally, social media is very popular as it acts as a medium for communication online while remaining professional. Platforms such as Instagram, Facebook, and LinkedIn are very popular. These allow for organizations and companies to post their objectives and opportunities as well as allowing ads to be displayed to give an even wider reach. VCSEs, such as Merton

Vision, and third party organizations like Groundwork and HandsOn agreed on the utility of social media platforms.

4.9 Employee Feedback

Throughout our stakeholder interviews, we discussed any feedback that stakeholders have received from previous employees who have volunteered in an employee volunteering scheme. For example, virtually all of the VCSEs with whom we spoke had no negative feedback to report about the experience with employee volunteers. Likewise, most VCSEs said that employee volunteers had little to no negative feedback to share. They gathered feedback from volunteers through two methods: first-hand feedback while volunteering, and electronic reporting, either through social media sharing or surveys. For example, the Wimbledon Guild uses SurveyMonkey to collect employee volunteers' responses at the end of their time volunteering (W. Pridmore, personal communication, March 21, 2024). Additionally, Age UK encourages its employee volunteers to share their experiences on social media to tell others about their experiences with the intent of spreading awareness of employee volunteering activities (K. Rodda, personal communication, April 9, 2024). Moreover, in our interview with Colliers Wood Community Centre, Joel Winter, who is a director of the charity, said that he often hears about positive feedback directly from employee volunteers (J. Winter, personal communication, April 5, 2024). He stated that employees enjoy coming to work with local organizations to make a positive impact and difference in the world. Since the Community Centre places employees in roles that they choose and that fit their skills, they are also able to do something that fits their skill set and engage in an activity that is fulfilling for them. This is very common positive feedback that we heard about from VCSEs in addition to a break away from their day job, the feeling of giving back to the local community, and meeting new people.

From the employer and third-party side, the feedback was also very similar to VCSEs. From employers, the positive feedback mostly included that the volunteering felt impactful and that the volunteering was good for team building. From host VCSEs and third-party organizations, the positive feedback was also very similar where employee volunteers felt like they made an impact with the volunteering they did. The negative feedback was more limited and varied across stakeholder groups. From employers, the negative feedback included issues with the volunteering app at first which was specific to Domestic and General. The negative

feedback from host VCSE managers who facilitate the volunteer events was that it can be difficult to manage employee volunteer expectations which are generally very high and that employees are sometimes unprepared for the tasks. There was no negative feedback discussed by third-party organizations.

We were also able to receive some feedback from the participating employees themselves through our survey. Every employee who participated indicated they received some type of benefit with the most prominent including making an impact on a community, experiencing morale satisfaction, and that their teamwork and collaboration had been improved. There were also some challenges faced as the majority of the respondents stated that they had conflicts managing work and volunteer responsibilities and some even experienced reduced work productivity during volunteering periods.

4.10 Current Employee to Volunteering Matching Techniques

The current matching software that is used by Merton Connected to match employees with volunteering opportunities suited to their skills and desires is called Simply Connect. We were given a demonstration of this platform by Loana Vazzano, the volunteering coordinator at Merton Connected, and Natasha Blok, the organizations and youth participation officer from Volunteer Centre Sutton, during a volunteering network event hosted by Merton Connected. Ms. Vazzano was able to show us the entire matching process from the perspective of the volunteer to Merton Connected to the VCSE.

Ms. Vazzano told us that the system was a huge improvement over the system that Merton Connected was using in prior years, but there are some aspects of the new software that could be improved. The process of looking for volunteering opportunities from the employee's perspective often required a lot of repetitive clicks on the user interface to do certain tasks where there could be more efficiency. When looking for a volunteering opportunity, the employee is able to provide preferences for types of volunteering opportunities; however, instead of the system showing the employee the best options based on their preferences, it filters out opportunities that do not meet the user's preference. In other words, the system filters rather than matches. Unfortunately, this means the system fails to highlight possible opportunities since it searches for exact matches with employee preferences. The last issue discussed was that when

initiating a new volunteer or organization in the system, Merton Connected has to manually approve their request.

The most limiting part of the system seemed to be that user feedback often is not addressed. Even when feedback is addressed, suggestions to improve the platform often take a very long time, even if they are minor changes. Simply Connect has proven to make organizations and companies aware of each other, but often the final steps of organization and planning are done through direct contact with the volunteer themselves or a representative and the volunteer manager.

4.11 Limitations of Findings

From our research, we were able to assess current practices and determine best practices in employee volunteering schemes to provide recommendations from this information. However, there are limitations in our findings. Our survey was composed of 54 respondents from only two employers, and therefore might not adequately represent all employee views and feedback. Future studies could distribute the survey to a greater number of employers to achieve a more balanced sample with more respondents. Similarly, we struggled to achieve responses from employers that did not have connections to Merton Connected or the specific VCSEs to whom we spoke resulting in a small sample from which to draw information. The employers and third parties we were able to interview outside of Merton to identify best practices in some cases operated on a larger scale than Merton Connected and its associates. This scale mismatch potentially restricts the applicability of the information to Merton Connected, employers, and VCSEs in Merton. In spite of these caveats, our findings allow us to make a number of recommendations to Merton Connected, which will be presented in the next section.

5.0 Conclusions and Recommendations

Based on our interviews and surveys with VCSEs, third parties, employers, and employees we draw eight major conclusions and several associated recommendations.

5.1 General Conclusions

Conclusion 1: Employee volunteering schemes are beneficial for both the employer and employee, offering corporate social responsibility, personal and career development, and feelings of fulfillment.

Conclusion 2: Demographic factors, such as seniority level and employment status (i.e., full or part-time), impact employee volunteering participation, with senior positions often having less time to volunteer, but potentially higher impact.

5.2 Conclusions With Recommendations

Conclusion 3: Major factors affecting employee participation in employee volunteering schemes are time, workload, and flexibility of the employee.

Recommendation 3.1: To eliminate barriers such as time constraints, workload, and lack of flexibility we recommend encouraging employers to add more flexibility when developing their employee volunteering schemes. This might entail giving a limited number of hours of paid time off (PTO) to volunteer instead of full days. Doing so would allow employees to utilize the hours in a more adaptable way to either take the full day off if desired or space out their volunteering time to allow for short recurring visits to organizations. Allowing the employees to have more control over their volunteering time would enable them to flex that time around their schedules to limit the stress of missing work and the feeling of being behind.

Recommendation 3.2: To eliminate barriers such as time constraints, workload, and lack of flexibility, we recommend encouraging VCSEs and Merton Connected to have more standardized training in the borough. For example, if multiple host VCSEs need specific training, provide an online accessible platform where this training can be completed and grant a certificate of completion. Allow this certificate to be accepted at locations that require the training. This feature would mean the employee volunteer may only have to complete the training once in a given period to be able to volunteer at many different host voluntary organizations. The time necessary to apply to volunteer or for training would be reduced.

Conclusion 4: A successful employee volunteering scheme requires effective advertisement to the employees.

Recommendation 4.1: To limit the lack of awareness and encourage participation in employee volunteering through promotion, we recommend employers use as many ways as possible to promote the mission and volunteering opportunities to employees. These include using public forums, such as workplace advertisements or showcasing past volunteer events and stories. Including updated volunteer opportunities across companywide sources of information, such as a company website or hub and newsletters, would also allow for further outreach among employees. We recommend promoting employee volunteering opportunities by having senior employees, management, or peers encourage participation by speaking directly to employees about volunteer opportunities in meetings or through personally addressed emails. As well as promoting the opportunities, we recommend that employers emphasize the benefits of employee volunteering such as professional development or any other incentives offered based on employee motivations.

Recommendation 4.2: To encourage companies to send their employees to a VCSE through their employee volunteering scheme, we recommend that Merton Connected and host VCSEs in Merton utilize promotional strategies to connect with companies. We recommend that VCSEs and Merton Connected should be active on platforms such as

LinkedIn where employers are also active. Posting volunteer opportunities or employee volunteering stories on LinkedIn that other employers can see may increase outreach and encourage more connections with companies. Another recommendation for Merton Connected and VCSEs in Merton would be to make a calendar or catalog that displays all the volunteering opportunities with the organization that can be given to a company once a connection is established. This would make it easier for the employer to promote the opportunities internally to reach employees.

Conclusion 5: Despite spikes in employee volunteering numbers during the pandemic, VCSE organizations struggle to maintain pre-pandemic numbers specifically in Merton.

Recommendation 5.1: To encourage employees to participate in their employee volunteering schemes as actively as before the pandemic we recommend that Merton Connected and VCSEs in Merton share ongoing volunteering experiences through social media, newsletters, and community forums to emphasize opportunities and encourage engagement. Furthermore, success stories that show the impact of volunteering work could also be shared online and through social media. Short-form content is heavily watched by many people nowadays, so creating 30-second long edited, concise, and attractive videos and sharing them on social media sites such as Instagram and YouTube could have a lot of potential for more outreach.

Conclusion 6: There are limitations to the technology in use that hinder the seamless matching of employees to host VCSEs in Merton.

Recommendation 6.1: To help improve the current technology used to match employees to volunteering opportunities we recommend that Merton Connected creates a robust user feedback system focused on making the matching process as easy and effective as possible. This feedback system would have to be responsive and accountable and would need to have contact with the software supplier (see Recommendation 6.2).

Recommendation 6.2: Contact representatives from the system currently in place who are involved in implementing user feedback changes in the system and describe concerns about unheard feedback and the length of time that it takes to make changes to the system. If they are still non-compliant, a new system will have to be considered where users have more say in the design specifically for the matching process.

Recommendation 6.3: To improve limitations and work through existing challenges with the current technology used by Merton Connected and VCSEs in Merton, we recommend that Merton Connected sets up a user committee, such as an online forum, for how the software is being used across all charities or third-parties. This would allow challenges to be posted and addressed by individuals who may have more experience or have found workarounds using the current software.

Conclusion 7: Expectations for the volunteering event must be set before the event takes place so allow for a productive and successful experience.

Recommendation 7.1: To ensure that the employee volunteering opportunity is positive and productive for the employee and the host VCSE, we recommend that, while setting up a potential event, the VCSE should make it clear what is expected of the volunteers when they arrive and what they hope to achieve. We also recommend concisely disclosing skills that would be helpful or necessary for the volunteering event as well as any training that may be required. This approach would allow employees to immediately understand what is expected as they are applying and allow them to come prepared with no surprises. Having clear expectations of the volunteers from the beginning would also aim to relieve pressure from the volunteer managers.

Conclusion 8: Employees are more likely to volunteer and perform well while volunteering if they can pick the organization and activity.

Recommendation 8.1: To increase employee participation in employee volunteering schemes, we recommend that employers utilize employees' motivations to volunteer,

such as personal connections to the VCSE. Employees are more likely to be motivated to volunteer if they have a personal connection or interest in the volunteering activity. Therefore, we further recommend that employers implement more choice into their employee volunteering schemes to allow employees to spend their volunteer hours at a legitimate organization of their choice. If implemented, spread awareness of this opportunity to other employees through necessary means of promotion to further increase participation. In order to help this process, we also recommend that third parties and VCSE organizations should make their volunteer opportunities easy to access, descriptive, and available as soon as possible to allow browsing employees avenues to many different opportunities that may be a good fit for them.

Recommendation 8.2: To further increase participation, we recommend allowing employees to share their volunteer organization of choice with others within their company to bring in more volunteer opportunities and spread more awareness on a personal level. We also recommend that employers set up a system, using personal contact between employees, where an employee can take over a volunteering task once the previous employees' paid time off has been used.

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Appendices

These appendices include our interviewees, interview scripts, and surveys used to gather data needed to understand the current employee volunteer schemes and programs inside and outside of Merton. They helped us make informed recommendations on how to improve those schemes.

Appendix A: Stakeholder Interviewee Information

Name	Position	Company/ organization	Type	Interview Date and Time (BST)
Keith Burns	Interim Director of Policy, Strategy and Innovation	Merton Council	Employer In Merton	3/19/2024 9:30 AM
Kathryn Wittams-Smith	Head of Human Resources	Merton Council	Employer In Merton	3/19/2024 9:30 AM
Hadley Percival	Marketing Manager	Domestic and General	Employer In Merton	4/5/2024 12:00 PM
Chloe Taylor	Marketing and Content Executive	Domestic and General	Employer In Merton	4/5/2024 12:00 PM
Andy Storr	Chief Inspector	Metropolitan Police	Employer In Merton	4/5/2024 4:00 PM
Hayley Downing	Acting Sergeant	Metropolitan Police	Employer In Merton	4/5/2024 4:00 PM
Jack Doyle	Vice President Corporate Social Responsibility Manager at Bank of America	Bank of America	Employer Outside Merton	4/3/2024 3:00 PM
Sarah Rayner	Benefits & Compensation Manager EMEA	OSI Systems	Employer Outside Merton	4/5/2024 1:30 PM
Courtney Davenport	Senior Associate, Community Impact Program Admin	BNY Mellon	Employer Outside Merton	4/12/2024 3:00 PM
Beau Fadahunsi	Head of Development and Volunteering	Merton Connected	Third-Party In Merton	4/19/2024 11:00 AM

Jon Meech	CEO	HandsOn London	Third-Party Outside Merton	4/9/2024 11:00 AM
Dominic Pinkney	CEO of Hammersmith & Fulham Volunteer Centre, Volunteer Centre Camden, and Works4U	Works 4U	Third-Party Outside Merton	4/12/2024 11:00 AM
Jackie Watkins	CEO	Tooting and Mitcham Community Sports Club	VCSE In Merton	4/3/2024 11:00 AM
Abdul Mohidin	Chair Trustee	Friends in St Helier	VCSE In Merton	4/3/2024 12:00 PM
Sarah Grand	Grants and Operations Manager	South Mitcham Community Centre	VCSE In Merton	4/3/2024 10:00 AM
Wendy Pridmore	CEO	Wimbledon Guild	VCSE In Merton	3/21/2024 2:00 PM
Naomi Martin	Director	Commonside Community Development Trust	VCSE In Merton	4/2/2024 2:00 PM
Joel Winter	Trustee and Membership Secretary	Colliers Wood Community Centre	VCSE In Merton	4/5/2024 2:30 PM
Hassan Khan	Volunteer Services Manager	Merton Vision	VCSE In Merton	4/5/2024 3:00 PM
Kourtney Rodda	Volunteering Manager	Age UK	VCSE In Merton	4/9/2024 10:00 AM
Sami Shaw	Community Project Coordinator (Corporate Social Responsibility)	Groundwork	Third-Party Outside Merton	4/11/2024 11:00 AM
Natasha Blok	Organisations and Youth Participation Officer	Volunteer Centre Sutton	VCSE Outside Merton	4/17/2024 3:00 PM
Mitus Castillo	Partnerships Manager	Education and Employers	VCSE Outside Merton	4/10/2024 11:00 AM

Appendix B: Third-Party Organization Stakeholder Interview Script

Introduction:

We are a group of students from Worcester Polytechnic Institute (WPI) conducting a research project in collaboration with Merton Connected to improve employee volunteering schemes.

We would be delighted if you would be able to take about 30 minutes of your time to answer some questions about employee volunteering schemes in Merton. Your participation in this interview is completely voluntary, and you may stop at any time throughout the interview or choose not to answer certain questions. We will be taking notes during the interview and would like to save a recording of the conversation with your permission. We may wish to quote you in our final report. Would you mind if we quote you by name or would you prefer us to anonymize your responses? We will give you an opportunity to review any quotations prior to publication, and we would be happy to provide you with a copy of the report when it is completed, if you would like. Any personal data you choose to share with us will be stored securely and disposed of on July 31st, 2024 in line with the UK General Data Protection Regulation 2018. Thank you for your support in this research. Do you have any questions for us before we begin? Feel free to contact Beau Fadahunsi at Merton Connected (beau@mertonconnected.co.uk) if you would prefer to ask her about your questions or concerns about this research.

Questions:

Note: The questions listed below cover all the topics we intend to discuss in an order that allows for a flow of conversation. However, we may still ask questions in a different order. We will ensure all topics are covered, and we will ask questions in an order that makes the interview feel conversational if not already answered in a previous response.

1. What is your current role within your organization?
2. How long have you been involved in employee volunteering initiatives?
3. Which VCSE organizations do you work with to develop and implement employee volunteering opportunities?

4. How does your organization identify and match volunteer opportunities with other organizations?
5. Can you describe the services your organization provides to other organizations in facilitating employee volunteering schemes?
6. Can you share any challenges or successes your organization has experienced in facilitating employee volunteering initiatives?
7. How does your organization measure the success or impact of its services in facilitating employee volunteering programs?
8. For employers that have implemented employee volunteering schemes, what were the primary motivations behind enacting these initiatives?
9. Can you provide examples of specific employee volunteering schemes that have been successful or impactful for both the employer and the community?
 - a. *If yes:* Do you know why they have or have not worked well?
10. What might motivate employees to engage in employee volunteering programs?

(OpenAI, 2023)

Appendix C: Employer Stakeholder Interview Script

Introduction:

We are a group of students from Worcester Polytechnic Institute (WPI) conducting a research project in collaboration with Merton Connected to improve employee volunteering schemes.

We would be delighted if you would be able to take about 30 minutes of your time to answer some questions about employee volunteering schemes in Merton. Your participation in this interview is completely voluntary, and you may stop at any time throughout the interview or choose not to answer certain questions. We will be taking notes during the interview and would like to save a recording of the conversation with your permission. We may wish to quote you in our final report. Would you mind if we quote you by name or would you prefer us to anonymize your responses? We will give you an opportunity to review any quotations prior to publication, and we would be happy to provide you with a copy of the report when it is completed, if you would like. Any personal data you choose to share with us will be stored securely and disposed of on July 1st, 2024 in line with the UK General Data Protection Regulation 2018. Thank you for your support in this research. Do you have any questions for us before we begin? Feel free to contact Beau Fadahunsi at Merton Connected (beau@mertonconnected.co.uk) if you would prefer to ask her about your questions or concerns about this research.

Questions:

Note: The questions listed below cover all the topics we intend to discuss in an order that allows for a flow of conversation. However, we may still ask questions in a different order. We will ensure all topics are covered, and we will ask questions in an order that makes the interview feel conversational if not already answered in a previous response.

1. Can you please describe to us the position you hold in your company and your primary role in employee volunteering?
2. Can you please describe the employee volunteering scheme at this company, including time given to employees for volunteering and where employees can volunteer?
 - a. *If they have a scheme:* When did your company begin using this scheme?

- i. Were there any different schemes used previously?
3. Approximately how many employees are employed at your company?
4. If you know, how many employees participated in employee volunteering this past year?
 - a. Has there been a change in this number since before COVID-19?
 - i. *If Yes:* Why do you think this is?
5. What kinds of employees, in terms of positions held, part time/full time, etc., do you think are likely to participate in employee volunteering, and alternatively, what kinds of employees do you think are unlikely to participate in employee volunteering?
6. *Leading off 5:* What barriers do you think or know of that prevent employees from participating in employee volunteering schemes at this company?
7. Are there aspects of employee volunteering at this company that you believe to be advantageous in encouraging employee participation?
8. Are there aspects of employee volunteering at this company that you believe to be disadvantageous in encouraging employee participation?
9. Can you share any positive feedback that employees have shared about their experience volunteering at this company?
10. Can you share any negative feedback that employees have shared about their experience volunteering at this company?
11. How do you see employee volunteering benefiting yourself as an employer, the company, the community, and the employee?
12. As part of our research to understand the state of current employee volunteering from employees' perspectives, we created a survey for them to provide feedback on any experiences or motivations in engaging in employee volunteering. Would you feel comfortable distributing the survey link internally among your colleagues and employees?
 - a. *If Yes:* Retrieve their contact information and send them a link to the Qualtrics survey we created.
13. Are there any similar organizations or organizations you partner with that may be beneficial for us to interview?
14. Are there any employee volunteering activities actively running at your organization?

- a. *If yes:* Would we be able to attend one of those activities to observe the structure and processes of them?
 - i. *If yes:* Would it be possible for us to also participate in it?

Appendix D: VCSE Stakeholder Interview Script

Introduction:

We are a group of students from Worcester Polytechnic Institute (WPI) conducting a research project in collaboration with Merton Connected to improve employee volunteering schemes. In order to do this, we need to understand Merton's current employee volunteering atmosphere.

We would be delighted if you would be able to take about an hour of your time to answer some questions about employee volunteering schemes in Merton. Your participation in this interview is completely voluntary, and you may stop at any time throughout the interview or choose not to answer certain questions. We will be taking notes during the interview and will save a recording of the conversation. We may wish to quote you in our final report. Would you mind if we quote you by name or would you prefer us to anonymize your responses? We will give you an opportunity to review any quotations prior to publication, and we would be happy to provide you with a copy of the report when it is completed, if you would like. Any personal data you choose to share with us will be stored securely and disposed of on July 31st, 2024 in line with the UK General Data Protection Regulation 2018. Thank you for your support in this research. Do you have any questions for us before we begin?

Questions:

Note: The questions listed below cover all the topics we intend to discuss in an order that allows for a flow of conversation. However, we may still ask questions in a different order. We will ensure all topics are covered, and we will ask questions in an order that makes the interview feel conversational if not already answered in a previous response.

1. Can you please describe to us the position you hold in your organization and your primary role in interacting with employee volunteering?
2. Can you please describe the employee volunteering schemes you've encountered at this organization?
3. If you know, how many employee volunteers were received by your organization this past year?

- a. Has there been a change in this number since before COVID-19?
 - i. *If Yes:* Why do you think this is?
4. Based on your experience, what kinds of employees do you think are likely to participate in employee volunteering, and alternatively, what kinds of employees do you think are unlikely to participate in employee volunteering?
5. *Leading off 5:* What barriers do you think or know of that prevent employees from participating in employee volunteering schemes?
6. Are there aspects of employee volunteering you've encountered that you believe to be advantageous or disadvantageous in encouraging employee participation?
7. Can you share any positive or negative feedback that employees have shared about their experience volunteering?
8. Do you think that employee volunteering benefits the employer, the company, the community, or the employee?
 - a. Why or why not?
9. Are there any similar organizations or organizations you partner with that may be beneficial for us to interview?
10. Are there any employee volunteering activities actively running at your organization?
 - a. *If yes:* Would we be able to attend one of those activities to observe the structure and processes of them?
 - i. *If yes:* Would it be possible for us to also participate in it?

Appendix E: Survey Outline

Survey title: Employee Feedback About Employee Volunteering Schemes in Merton

Introduction:

We wish to thank you in advance for participating in this survey. We are students from Worcester Polytechnic Institute (WPI), a college located in Worcester, Massachusetts within the United States, and we are conducting research in collaboration with Merton Connected. Through this survey, we hope to determine the status of current employee volunteering schemes in Merton and solicit feedback on potential improvements to these schemes. Your honest feedback will be very important in helping to enhance and expand such initiatives within the community.

This survey contains 14 questions and will take approximately 10 minutes. By participating in this survey, you are consenting to the use of your responses for research purposes. Your responses will remain confidential. WPI and Merton Connected will use the data collected in research reports and other outputs. All data will be reported confidentially.

Any personal data you choose to share with us will be stored securely and disposed of no later than July 31st, 2024 in line with the UK General Data Protection Regulation 2018.

If you have any queries about the survey please contact us at gr-Lon_D24_Merton@wpi.edu or contact our academic advisors Professor Dominic Golding (golding@wpi.edu) and Professor Bruce Bursten (bbursten@wpi.edu).

If you have any questions about how Merton Connected uses data please see Merton Connected's [Privacy Policy](#) or email Beau Fadahunsi, Head of Development and Volunteering, at beau@mertonconnected.co.uk.

(Show a progress bar for total questions answered)

1. To better understand the profile of employees who have and have not participated in employer volunteering schemes, please provide the following demographic information or select 'prefer not to answer'.

Gender:

- Male
- Female
- Non-binary/Other
- Prefer not to say

Age:

- Under 25
- 25-34
- 35-44
- 45-54
- 55-64
- Over 64
- Prefer not to say

2. To provide context to your response and ensure the relevance of our analysis, please provide the name of the organization that employs you currently.

[Text Box]

3. Are you aware that your employer runs a programme for employees to volunteer at other organizations in Merton?

- Yes
- No

If no, then go to question 3.1, otherwise go to question 4

3.1 Would you be interested in learning about this programme?

Yes

No

3.2 Please suggest how your employer could better inform employees about the volunteer programme.

[Text Box]

3.3 Please suggest ways your employer might increase employee participation in such a programme.

[Text Box]

Proceed to question 4.1

4. Have you participated in this programme in the past 4 years?

Yes

No

If no, then go to question 4.1, otherwise, go to question 5.

4.1 Have you participated in employee volunteering programmes offered by a previous employer in Merton in the past 4 years?

Yes

No

If no, go to question 4.2, otherwise, go to question 5.

4.2 Have you participated in employee volunteering programmes offered by previous employers outside Merton in the past 4 years?

Yes

No

If no, go to question 4.3.

If yes, go to question 4.2.1.

4.2.1 What factors influenced your decision to participate in employee volunteering in locations other than Merton?

[Text Box]

Go to question 5.5

4.3 Please select the factors that have influenced your decision not to participate in employee volunteering.

- Lack of time
- Lack of information
- Lack of employer support
- Lack of interest in available activities
- Not knowing anyone participating
- Other commitments and responsibilities

Other (please specify) [free response]

4.4 Do you know anyone who has participated in employee volunteering in London?

Yes

No

4.5 Do you know anyone who has participated in employee volunteering in Merton?

Yes

No

4.6 How likely are you in the future to participate in employee volunteering activities?

Extremely unlikely, somewhat unlikely, neither likely nor unlikely, somewhat likely, extremely likely

(Linkert scale)

4.7 Would you be more likely to participate in employee volunteering activities in the future if incentives or benefits were offered by your employer?

Yes

No

If yes, go to 4.7.1, otherwise go to 4.8.

4.7.1 You indicated that you would be more likely to participate in employee volunteering activities if incentives or benefits were offered. Which of the following types of incentives or benefits would be most motivating for you? (Please tick all that apply).

Paid time off for volunteering

- Recognition or awards for volunteer efforts
- Opportunities for skills development or training related to volunteering
- Team-building events or activities associated with volunteering
- Other (please specify) [free response]

4.8. Is there anything else you would like to say about employee volunteering programmes, such as better ways to encourage participation? (Optional)

[Text Box]

Thank you for taking the time to complete this survey. Your input will help improve employee volunteering programs in Merton and benefit the local community. If you have any additional comments or feedback, please feel free to reach out to the email address gr-lon_d24_merton@wpi.edu.

-- End survey --

5. How often do you engage in employee volunteering in Merton?

- Regularly (weekly/monthly)
- Occasionally (a few times a year)
- Rarely (once or twice ever)

6. What motivated you to participate in employee volunteering in Merton? (Please tick all that apply).

- Team bonding opportunities
- Encouragement from employer

- Desire to give back to the community
- Skill development opportunities
- Personal interest in the cause
- Other (please specify) [free response]

7. What benefits do you believe result from employee volunteering in Merton? (Please tick all that apply).

- Increased employee morale and satisfaction
- Improved teamwork and collaboration
- Positive impact on local community
- Personal development
- Improved teamwork and collaboration
- Enhanced organization reputation
- No benefits
- Other (please specify): [free response]

8. What drawbacks are there for employees participating in employee volunteering programmes in Merton? (Please tick all that apply).

- Challenges in managing work-life balance
- Reduced work productivity at work during volunteering periods
- Conflicts managing work commitments and volunteering responsibilities
- Employee burnout or fatigue from additional commitments
- Increased work responsibilities for employees not volunteering
- No drawbacks
- Other (please specify): [free response]

9. Please explain whether you have or have not enjoyed your employee volunteering experience.

[Text Box]

10. What, if any, challenges or difficulties did you encounter while participating in employee volunteering in Merton? (Please tick all that apply).

- Finding time to volunteer
- Lack of support from employer
- Lack of support from family
- Lack of interesting employee volunteering opportunities
- Transportation challenges
- No challenges or difficulties
- Other (please specify) [Text Box]

11. How likely are you in the future to participate in employee volunteering activities?

Extremely unlikely, somewhat unlikely, neither likely nor unlikely, somewhat likely, extremely likely

(Linkert scale)

12. Would you be more likely to volunteer in the future if incentives are offered?

If yes then go to 12.1, else go to 13

12.1 You indicated that you would be more likely to participate in employee volunteering activities if incentives or benefits were offered. Which of the following types of incentives or benefits would be most motivating for you? (Please tick all that apply).

- Paid time off for volunteering
- Recognition or awards for volunteer efforts
- Employee matching donations to charitable organizations
- Opportunities for skills development or training related to volunteering
- Team-building events or activities associated with volunteering
- Other (please specify) [free response]

13. Is there anything else you would like to share about your experiences with employee volunteering as a whole? (Optional)

[Text Box]

Thank you for taking the time to complete this survey. Your input will help improve employee volunteering programs in Merton and benefit the local community. If you have any additional comments or feedback, please feel free to reach out to us at gr-lon_d24_merton@wpi.edu.

-- End survey --

(OpenAI, 2023)

Appendix F: Sponsor Description

The Borough of Merton is an outer London Borough southwest of the city, as shown in red in Figure 10. As per the 2021 census for Merton, the borough has more than 215,000 residents (Population - UTLA | Merton | Report Builder for ArcGIS, 2021) with diverse socio-economic and demographic backgrounds. There are more than 12,000 businesses within the community (Merton: The People and The Place, 2023).



Figure 10: Merton Borough Indicated in Red on a Map of the London Boroughs (“London Borough of Merton,” 2023)

There is a socioeconomic divide in Merton between the more affluent eastern side and the deprived western side of the borough, as shown in Figures 11 and 12. Figure 11 shows the divide in terms of deprivation scores¹⁰ and indicates that the overall deprivation in Merton has been slightly reduced from 2015 to 2019. Figure 12 illustrates the divide using a different set of measures, such as job insecurity, youth poverty, and deprivation scores by Lower Super Output Areas (LSOAs).

¹⁰ A deprivation score is used to show if one area is more deprived than another. It is calculated by factoring in percent living in poverty, percent with less than 12 years of education, percent single-parent households, percent living in rented housing units, percent living in overcrowded housing units, percent of households without a car, and percent of non-employed adults under 65 years of age. A higher deprivation score indicates more deprivation (Social Deprivation Index, 2021).

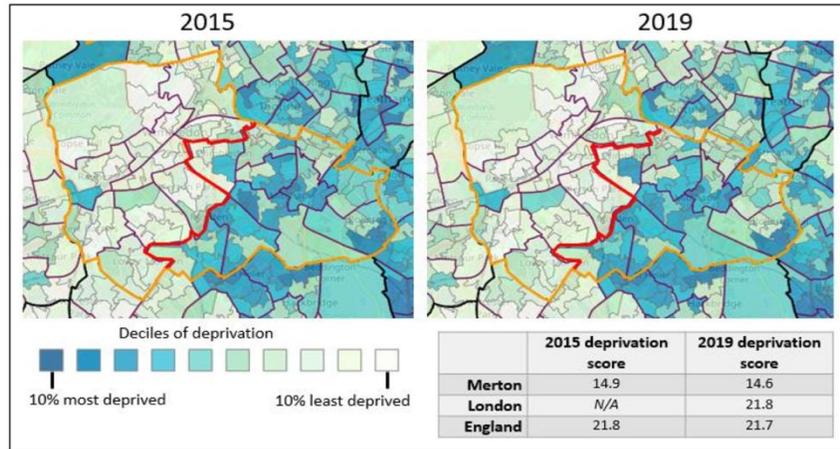


Figure 11: Deciles of Deprivation of Merton from 2015 to 2019 Relative to London and the Whole of England (Indices of Deprivation 2015 and 2019, n.d.)

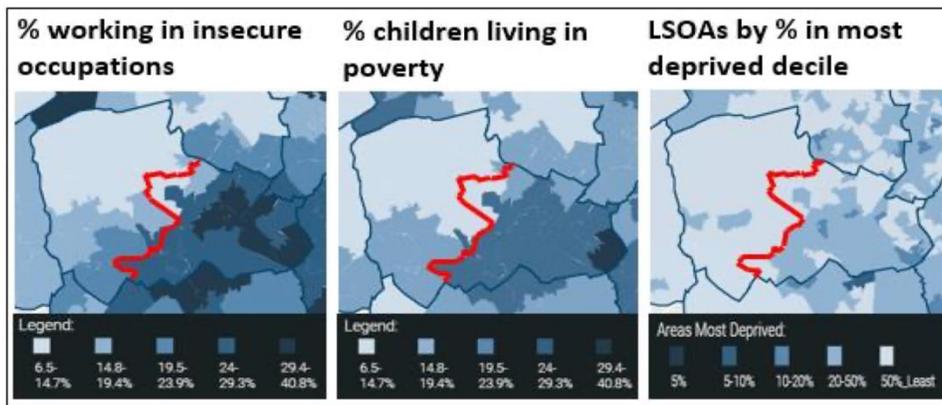


Figure 12: Graph of Socioeconomic Differences of East and West Merton by Scale of Job Insecurity, Children in Poverty, and Deprivation Decile (London Datastore, 2023)

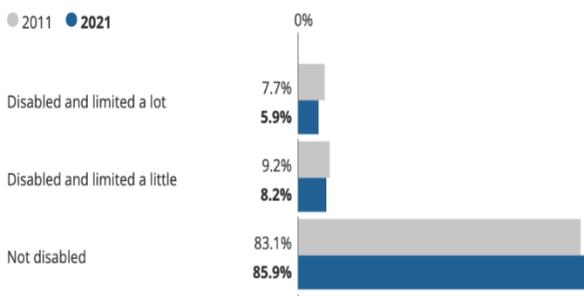
To help ameliorate the socioeconomic gap and foster greater equity in the provision of services among the communities in Merton, Merton Connected, a community-based non-profit organization, is dedicated to establishing an inclusive and interconnected environment. This environment encourages residents to actively engage, collaborate, and benefit from a diverse range of activities and resources. Since its inception in 1984 with only 50 members, Merton Connected has undergone significant growth and expanded its support to numerous organizations and individuals across the borough (Merton Connected, 2021). The organization's mission revolves around creating a vibrant and interconnected community where individuals and groups can thrive. They envision a borough where everyone can participate, contribute, and benefit from a wide range of activities and resources. With a commitment to inclusivity and diversity, the organization strives to support the community and other organizations to “establish, develop and become sustainable” through “encouraging”, “supporting” and “developing volunteering” to benefit them (Merton Connected, 2021, “About Us”). Merton Connected focuses its resources on helping those in need in a variety of forms of assistance so that everyone’s basic needs can be

fulfilled. Local businesses are also called upon to aid the mission by deploying employee volunteers and making charitable contributions.

At the heart of its operations, Merton Connected is a central hub for many community activities and initiatives. According to the Merton Connected website, the organization is actively involved in seven distinct areas: "supporting organizations," "encouraging volunteering," "implementing social prescribing in Merton," "facilitating Healthwatch Merton," "managing the home visits library service," serving as a "founding partner of Merton Giving," and playing a central role as a "key partner in the community hub" (Merton Connected, 2021, "About Us").

Merton Connected provides outreach support for local voluntary, community, and faith organizations in the community. The developmental team at Merton Connected provides foundational, developmental, and sustainable services for these local organizations (Merton Connected, 2021, "Organisations"). Furthermore, Merton Connected has a volunteer program to encourage inter-community support from resident volunteers to local organizations (Merton Connected, 2021, "Volunteers"). They also provide health care support through social prescribing and host Healthwatch. Figures 13 and 14 show that there is a significant portion of Merton who can benefit from these services from having poor health or disabilities.

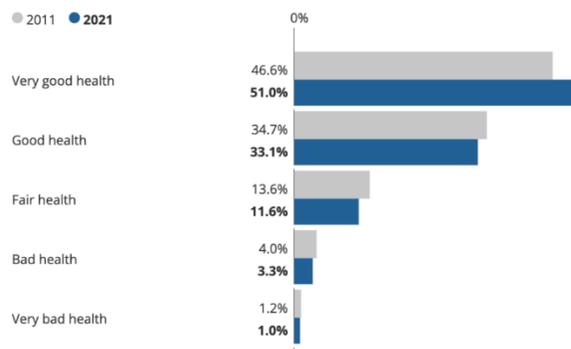
Age-standardised proportion of usual residents by long-term health condition or illness, Merton



Source: Office for National Statistics – 2011 Census and Census 2021

Figure 13: Health Ratings in Merton (Merton Census 2021, 2021)

Age-standardised proportion of usual residents by self-reported health, Merton



Source: Office for National Statistics – 2011 Census and Census 2021

Figure 14: Disability Status in Merton (Merton Census 2021, 2021)

The social prescribing team’s mission is to work with general practitioners to provide nonclinical services to patients in primary care through local groups and activities to improve support sources (Merton Connected, 2021, "Social Prescribing"). Host Healthwatch Merton works with residents to ensure that they are getting the most out of the health and social care services in the community by understanding the views and experiences of residents (Healthwatch Merton, 2023). Finally, Merton Connected has a home library service for residents in the community who have difficulties accessing the library. There is a service team that works with volunteers to deliver books to residents in the community (Merton Connected, 2023, "Library Service").

Merton Connected is also a founding partner to Merton Giving whose mission is “... [To] harness the collective strength of our community and, through donations and fundraising activities from our supporters, [we] award grants to charitable organizations working locally to tackle inequality and change lives for the better in Merton” (Healthwatch Merton, 2023). Finally, Merton Connected partners with the Merton Community Hub to assist residents experiencing isolation, which was exacerbated during the COVID-19 pandemic, by providing essential support (Merton Community Hub, 2023). This support ranges from running errands for residents to offering a supportive presence for conversations.

A significant portion of the borough of Merton has been directly impacted by Merton Connected activities. Merton Connected handles thousands of referrals each year. Demand for the services of Merton Connected continues to grow and referrals have increased from 1,619 from 2019 to 2021 to 2,615 from 2021 to 2022. To help with the increase in clients, many new volunteers have been recruited. There was a notable outpouring of support during the pandemic and 943 new volunteers were recruited between 2019 to 2021. Merton Connected continues to recruit new volunteers, but the pace of recruitment has slowed. For example, 260 new volunteers were recruited from 2021 to 2022.

In terms of funding, Merton receives hundreds of thousands of pounds each year and disburses them to local Voluntary, Community, and Social Enterprise (VCSE) organizations. From 2019 to 2021, £735,000 was given to 23 different organizations (MVSC Annual Review, 2019-2021) (MVSC Annual Review, 2021-2022). Merton Connected raises this money from donations, charitable activities, grants and contracts, trading activities, and investments (MVSC FS22 Accounts Final Version, 2022).

Merton Connected has been commissioned by the London Borough of Merton to lead and collaborate in developing a volunteer strategy for the borough. Part of that strategy is to increase employee volunteering schemes, recognizing the valuable contribution local businesses can make in supporting Merton’s diverse resources and activities. To further support this mission, Merton Connected will partner with Worcester Polytechnic Institute (WPI), which is a college in Worcester, Massachusetts, in January 2024 to research and improve their employee volunteering schemes.