

An exploration of volunteers' experiences at the London 2012 Paralympic Games

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Research questions

1. How did volunteering feature in the lives of volunteers prior to the London 2012 Paralympic Games?
2. What are volunteers' reasons for volunteering at the London 2012 Paralympic Games and what are their aspirations for volunteering at the event?
3. What are the experiences of volunteers during the London 2012 Paralympic Games?
4. How do volunteers' understandings of disability, disability sport and the 'disabled' athlete evolve as a result of their volunteering experience?



Gathering evidence

- Qualitative longitudinal research.
- Series of qualitative interviews with 26 Games Makers at four stages of the 'volunteer journey'.
- A total of 91 interviews – before (26), during (17), after (25) and 12 months after (23).
- 15 Games Makers completed all four interviews.
- Research was approved and supported by the IPC.



The Volunteer Journey - Antecedents

Previous engagement with volunteering

- Individuals had complex volunteering histories which related to a number of factors e.g. life stage, type of volunteering and personal motivations.
- Volunteering predominantly conceptualised as 'giving something back'.
- Episodic volunteering and volunteering undertaken within the context of personal interests was less likely to be considered 'real' volunteering.

"I think real volunteering is getting up every Sunday morning and walking round and round leading a dull old pony with a person with a disability riding them year in and year out. That's the commitment of volunteering, Sports volunteering, I think, it's just a fun day out really."
Megan, before interview



The Volunteer Journey - Antecedents

Understandings of disability, disability sport and the 'disabled' athlete

- Hesitant when discussing disability.
- Lack of training prior to the Games.
- Wide spectrum of disability.
- Impairment.
- Paralympic Games viewed as inferior to the Olympic Games.

"It's hard to be politically correct, someone who (pause) I can't explain it without sounding rude and I'm not rude... there are so many different disabilities and then you have to be politically correct in the way you say it and then no one talks about it...I don't want to say anything wrong or not politically correct and all that malarkey."
(Rachel before interview)



The Volunteer Journey - Antecedents

Motivations for volunteering at London 2012

- Volunteers applied for 'London 2012' rather than specifically to the Paralympic Games.
- Little differentiation between the Olympic and Paralympic Games.
- Reasons for volunteering related to the unique nature of the event rather than issues relating to disability and disability sport.
- Perception of the Paralympic Games.

"Nothing interested me in the Paralympics; it wasn't the Paralympics. They were looking for volunteers for the Olympics, no mention of the Paralympics... So it wasn't I wanted to do the Paralympics of the Olympics, I just wanted to do whatever they wanted me to do."
Alan, before interview



The Volunteer Journey - Experiences

A distinct form of volunteering due to...

Features of the mega-event experience (part of it)	Attributes of mega-events	Disability
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Accessing restricted areas • Watching sport • Observing unique experiences • Working in close proximity to athletes and Paralympic officials • Interaction with the public • Atmosphere • Collective Games Maker identity 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Intensity • Scale • Duration • Global attention • Recognition • Rewards 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Exposure to disability • 'Normalisation' of disability



The Volunteer Journey - Consequences

Volunteer legacy

- Increased inclination to volunteer in the 'afterglow' of London 2012 and increased awareness of volunteer opportunities.
- Increased levels of episodic volunteering amongst those who were not actively volunteering prior to the Games.
- Those who were regular 'collective' volunteers prior to the Games returned to their existing levels of volunteering.

"Prior to London 2012, I would have only done local things. So it would have been I'll do the local half marathon and that's it. It's in my comfort zone, whereas now, I'm looking at things further afield like the World Police and Fire Games and Glasgow Commonwealth Games." Adam, after interview



The Volunteer Journey - Consequences

Volunteer legacy

Participant	Pre London 2012 Volunteering	Plans to Volunteer (Post Games)	Actual Volunteering 12 Months After the Games
Feya	Street collections Student volunteering (rag week) Manchester Commonwealth Games (Event Services) Shine (annual midnight walk for Cancer Research)	World Police and Fire Games Glasgow Commonwealth Games Rio 2016	National Badminton Championships International Festival Literature Festival World Police and Fire Games (trained to become a technical official) National Cycling event Interview for Glasgow Commonwealth Games
Penny	Informal volunteering whilst growing up helping her mum with play days Episodic volunteering at scout camps (helping Deaf child) Girl guide leader	Returned to existing volunteering	Continued existing volunteering



The Volunteer Journey - Consequences

Understandings of disability, disability sport and the 'disabled' athlete

- More 'comfortable' discussing disability.
- Process of 'learning' about disability
- Focus on the abilities of disabled people and athletes.
- Increased expectations of disabled people.

'When you are around so many different people in such a short space of time and when 90% have some form of disability you have no choice. You have to learn very quickly how to deal with their disability in a way that is not offensive to anyone but in a way you are comfortable.'
(Melissa, after interview)



Pulling it together

- Motivations associated with the unique nature of the event as opposed to disability and disability sport.
- Experience at the London 2012 Paralympic Games broadened understandings of volunteering – increase in episodic volunteering.
- Volunteering at the Paralympic Games led to more favourable attitudes towards disability.



Implications

- Benefits of longitudinal research.
- Sustainability of changes?
- Volunteer legacy.
- Need for research at smaller scale disability sport events.
- Unsuccessful applicants?



Thank you for listening

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