

## **Challenging narratives : the importance of informal volunteering**

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### **Published version**

DEAN, Jonathan (2011). Challenging narratives : the importance of informal volunteering. In: NCVO/VSSN Researching the Voluntary Sector Conference 2011, NCVO, London, 7-8 September 2011. (Unpublished)

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# The Importance of Informal Volunteering

Jon Dean, University of Kent

*Challenging narratives: Towards an understanding of the history  
of volunteering*

NCVO/VSSN Conference 2011

**Informal volunteering:** Giving unpaid help as an individual, for example to friends, relatives or neighbours. *Not counted as volunteering for the purposes of this study.*

From Appendix C: Glossary, Helping Out: A national survey of volunteering and charitable giving, 2007.

# The extent of informal volunteering

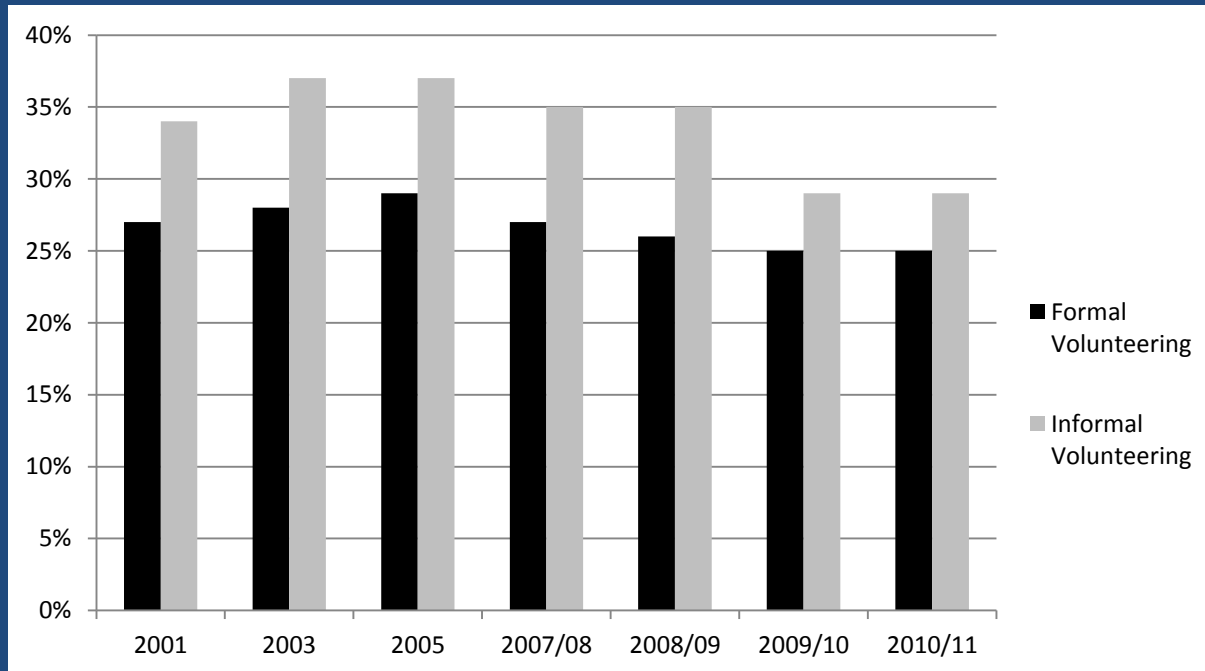


Figure 8.1: Regular formal and informal volunteering in the UK, 2001-2009. Adapted from DCLG (2009: 11-2; 2011: 8-9).

# Informal Volunteering and its Unwritten History

- Lack of cohesive narrative
- Lack of leaders and individual campaigns
- 'Mutual struggle' is far more attractive than 'mutual support'

# NI6

- Part of the National Indicator Set
- “NI 6 will measure the levels of volunteering within a local authority area, specifically the proportion of individuals undertaking regular (once a month) formal volunteering.”  
(NI6 Briefing Document, Cabinet Office)

# Informal Volunteering and Eastwood

“I think it acts against areas like us. It’s a middle class idea, formal volunteering, and it’s one for people like me. It’s coming from a place of authority, and a lot of people in Eastwood don’t have those networks and actually if they did they wouldn’t choose to volunteer in those ways. They’d much rather do volunteering for their neighbour... If the question was ‘do you, once a month, do something to help someone in your community?’ that would be more meaningful to us, and I think lots of people do that.”

(Graeme, Director of Eastwood Local Strategic Partnership)

# Conclusions

- To malign informal voluntary action maligns those who participate in it
- Research questions need to be more nuanced
- Encouraging informal volunteering should be the job of those working in volunteering brokerage