



Community Strategy & Research

Ballinaclesh | Rathdrum | Co. Wicklow | Ireland

Is the climate right for VSO Ireland to actively recruit experienced professionals for short term placements overseas, and which models of short term volunteering will ensure the greatest impact for the communities VSO works in?

Report by Hannah Grene, April 2014



Community Strategy & Research

Table of Contents

| | |
|--------------------------------------------------------|----|
| Executive summary..... | 3 |
| Part One: Introduction..... | 7 |
| Part Two: Reflections on short term volunteering | 12 |
| Part Three: Models of short term volunteering | 22 |
| Part Four: Recommendations..... | 28 |
| Appendix A: Case studies..... | 31 |
| Appendix B: List of interviews conducted | 42 |
| Appendix C: Bibliography..... | 44 |

Executive summary

The following report, commissioned by VSO Ireland and written by Hannah Grene, Barncat Consulting, provides a perspective on whether, where and how to send increased numbers of skilled volunteers on short term placements (defined by VSO Ireland as anywhere up to 6 months) to programme countries. The report concludes that short term volunteers can make a meaningful contribution to programmes and to development goals, if such placements are carefully planned and implemented as part of a larger plan.

The research identified and studied six primary case studies of short term volunteering models, one within VSO and five in other volunteer-involving organisations. Research was conducted through a review of literature relating to short term volunteering in general and to the case studies in particular, and through 36 semi-structured interviews, mostly in the course of a brief field trip to Uganda and Tanzania.

Despite a marked trend towards short term volunteering, the academic literature mostly concludes that longer term volunteer placements have better outcomes, although much of the literature is considering very short term, unskilled placements. Nonetheless, the literature points to the importance of even short term volunteer placements in building social capital and in provoking longer term activism.

Several other advantages to short term volunteering are identified in this report, as summarised below:

- Short term placements are easier to fill
- Increases the likelihood of attracting highly experienced, senior individuals
- Minimises risks of being drawn into service delivery
- Can help to cover a greater range of specialities
- May increase the numbers of Irish volunteers abroad
- May play to Ireland's strengths as a small but well-regarded player in development

In order to ensure maximum impact from shorter term volunteers, however, careful consideration needs to be given to each of the stages of the volunteer life-cycle: selection and training; impact during stay; and enduring impact following the placements. When selecting and training volunteers, there are number of competing factors to consider: on the one hand, it should be possible to streamline the recruitment process for shorter placements, but on the other, given the reduced time for the volunteer to adapt, there is an even greater need to select the right person and train them well. For this reason, it is recommended that short term volunteers should have demonstrable cross-cultural competencies – either overseas experience, or experience in working with other cultures in a professional context. To enhance impact during the volunteer’s stay, a strong VSO support system is essential, and short term volunteers should be placed along long term volunteers wherever possible. Role descriptions should be very well defined, and there should be as little time lag as possible between post design and selection. The greatest concern, however, should be with ensuring impact following the placement – short term volunteers can achieve a large amount in a short time, but ensuring that lasting change ensues can be more challenging. In this regard, it is vital that short term volunteers are deployed as part of a larger project or plan, and where possible using models that ensure a level of continuity, such as repeat or combination on-site/remote volunteering.

Other considerations associated with short term volunteering include: higher cost and managerial burden (of multiple short term volunteers versus one long term volunteer); a risk of supply of short term volunteers outweighing actual needs of the partner organisations in programme design and delivery (supply rather than demand driven focus); and the risk of VSO moving into a more crowded marketplace in moving towards shorter term volunteering.

A key part of the research was to identify and analyse various models of short term volunteering. **‘Once-off’ short term volunteering placements** may be useful in certain circumstances – several respondents had used them in helping to design or pilot a new programme, while others felt that sometimes a shorter placement was all that was needed to fulfil a particular requirement. **Short term volunteering alongside a long-term volunteer** was extremely well regarded, with the long term volunteer providing continuity and building up a relationship with the partner, while the short term volunteer provided specific skill sets and a burst of renewed impetus and enthusiasm to the project. **Clusters of short term volunteers** might present a challenge in terms of managerial burden, although have been implemented to good

effect in certain circumstances.

VSO in St Francis Hospital, Tanzania are employing an interesting **repeat volunteering** model, whereby sixteen volunteers commit to two week placements three times a year over three years, alongside two long term volunteers. Several respondents felt that the repeat model was even more conducive to sustainable capacity building than long term volunteering, because while the volunteer helped to plan and retain momentum through multiple visits, the partner was solely responsible for implementation in the volunteer's absence, establishing the groundwork for sustainable change once the project has ended. The strength of repeat volunteering is supported by evidence from NHS evaluations of repeat volunteering in north-south healthcare links. The drawback of this model is that it is very high cost. **Relay volunteering** is also costly, and does not allow for the same relationships of trust to develop between partner and volunteer as in the repeat model. However, this could be offset by placing relay volunteers alongside a long term volunteer acting as an 'anchor', as discussed above. Finally, **combined remote and on-site volunteering**, particularly as part of a repeat volunteering placement, where a volunteer stays in touch between visits, can be very effective, and could be an interesting model for VSO to explore further.

The recommendations of the report can be summarised as follows:

1. Short term placements should be implemented as part of a long term plan or project.
2. Short term placements should be well-defined and highly targeted.
3. Screening and assignment procedures should be modified for short term volunteers, allowing for faster recruitment, without compromising on best fit for the role.
4. Short term volunteers should have demonstrable cross-cultural competencies.
5. Experience requirements should be higher for short term volunteers.
6. Short term volunteers should be placed within relatively well-developed organisations, with some familiarity in engaging with outside expertise, to keep language and cultural barriers to a minimum. For organisations with more limited capacity, a long term volunteer will always be preferable.
7. A strong VSO support system is needed for short term volunteers, and should be placed alongside a long term volunteer wherever possible.
8. VSO should consider deploying short term volunteers in health placements in the first



Community Strategy & Research

instance.

9. VSO should actively consider incorporating elements of repeat and remote volunteering models into their programmes. For example, an initial 3-6 month placement, followed by six months to a year where the volunteer is available for consultation with the partner remotely, culminating in a 2-3 week follow up visit might be an interesting model to explore.

Part One: Introduction

The following report was commissioned by VSO Ireland to explore models of short term skilled volunteering and their effectiveness in contributing to programmes and achieving development goals. It sits alongside a separate piece of research, undertaken by Hays Research, which looks at availability of highly qualified professionals for short term volunteer placements overseas.

During the desk research, a brief literature review was conducted, and six case studies of short term volunteering, one within VSO and five in other volunteer-involving organisations (VIOs) were identified. The focus was on well-established organisations with a proven track record in delivering meaningful impact, and with experience in implementing placements of varying duration, to allow for a comparative perspective. The case studies are detailed individually in appendix, referred to throughout and a brief glossary provided overleaf.

Two case studies are concerned specifically with health, one largely with finance, and three send volunteers in a range of fields. Since VSO Ireland is not primarily interested in corporate volunteering, and given the ongoing research within VSO in the UK on corporate volunteering, only one of the case studies (Bankers without Borders) employs a partially corporate approach. Views on whether and how to implement short term volunteer placements was also gathered from three VSO country offices: VSO Uganda, VSO Tanzania and VSO Ethiopia. Research was conducted by an extensive review of the literature and project documents connected to the case studies, and through 36 semi-structured interviews, mostly carried out during a brief visit to Uganda and Tanzania by the researcher and James O'Brien, Advocacy and Policy Specialist for VSO Ireland in March 2014. Helen Lane, Programme Funding Adviser for VSO Ireland also undertook interviews with VSO Ethiopia, the American International Health Alliance Ethiopia office and one VSO short term volunteer during a separate monitoring visit to Ethiopia. A full list of interviews is included in appendix.

Case studies at a glance

Australian Volunteers International (AVI)/Australian Volunteers for International Development (AVID) AVID is the Australian government's overseas volunteering initiative, delivered by three partners following an open call for tenders in 2011, of which AVI is one.

Bankers without Borders is the volunteering initiative by microfinance institution the Grameen Foundation.

Peace Corps Response is the Peace Corps programme for short term skilled volunteers which runs alongside their two year programme which is primarily for recent graduates.

The Uganda Maternal Health Hub is a network of several health links between Ugandan and UK hospitals, which is currently funded by THET in the UK to send volunteers on 6 months or longer placements. The network is led by the Liverpool-Mulago partnership, which also has experience in sending volunteers on very short repeat placements between the two hospitals. The co-ordinator, Professor Louise Ackers, has analysed these types of exchanges, including in a 2011 evaluation for the NHS of North-South health links.

World Friends Korea is the volunteering initiative of the Korean International Cooperation Agency (KOICA), which sends volunteers on placements of varying length.

VSO in St Francis Referral Hospital, Ifakara is a project funded by the Swiss Agency for Development Cooperation (SCD) and won at open tender by VSO. It involves two long term volunteers, and fifteen short term volunteers who each commit to two weeks three times a year onsite, over a period of three years.

Literature review

There is a growing body of work on international volunteering and how to measure its impact, both on the volunteer and on the host community. Much of the literature discusses the need to better measure the ‘*true value*’ of volunteering in ‘*creating harmonious societies marked by high levels of social cohesion and well-being*’¹, but acknowledges that such impact is often harder to measure.²

A trend towards short term volunteering is noted. The Comhlámh report *New Evidence on Overseas Volunteering from Ireland* found that 92% of volunteers overseas spent 3 months or less in post.³ The UN’s State of the World’s Volunteerism Report 2011 points to a trend towards more short term volunteering, and an average placement of less than six months.⁴ Despite this, there are relatively few studies that look at short term volunteering specifically, and those that compare short term and long term tend to conclude that longer term placements are preferable – Benjamin Lough speaks of the ‘*mounting evidence on the value of longer-term international voluntary service placements*’.⁵ It must be noted that most studies of short term volunteering tend to focus on non-expert and often youth volunteering placements, and not with higher skilled volunteers⁶, and that short is often really short – Lough et al. speak of a ‘*growing*

¹ UNV/UNDP, *State of the World’s Volunteerism Report*, 2011, p14.

² Benjamin Lough and Lenore Matthew., *Measuring and Conveying the Added Value of International Volunteering* Forum discussion paper 2013, p1, 8.

³ Pat McCloughan, *New Evidence on Overseas Volunteering from Ireland and its Socio-Economic Impact in Ireland*, Comhlámh, 2013, p9.

⁴ UNV/UNDP, *State of the World’s Volunteerism Report*, 2011.

⁵ Presentation by Benjamin Lough of findings from: Lough, Benjamin J., McBride, Amanda Moore, & Sherraden, Margaret Sherrard. (unpublished). *The effects of demand-driven international service on bridging social capital*. Journal of International Development., available at: swsddata.org/presentations/WSO89_5.pptx

⁶ E.g. Benjamin J. Lough, Amanda Moore McBride and Margaret S. Sherraden ‘Capacity Building Contributions of Short Term International Volunteers’ in *Journal of Community Practice*, 19 (2) 120-137, 2011, looks at non-expert volunteers, 70% under 25 years old, in Peru; John Cape, ‘The Value of Short term Volunteerism’ in *Monthly Developments Magazine* (June 2012, Vol. 30, Issue 6) looks at young people undertaking ‘service-learning’

consensus’ that short term volunteering is eight weeks or less⁷, whereas VSO’s definition is anything up to six months. It might be more accurate to conclude that the literature generally shows that longer term placements are more desirable for non-expert volunteers. For example, a study of international health volunteers in sub-Saharan Africa, reflecting the views of a focus group of African doctors stated: *‘The view dominated that international health volunteers are mostly junior, inexperienced and ill-prepared for work in low-income countries and this both for cultural and professional reasons....Quite often they were seen as undervaluing local staff knowledge. These problems are especially disturbing if volunteers come for short assignments, resulting in high turnover and lack of continuity.’*⁸ However, the focus group then went on to praise: *‘transfer of specific technical skills, especially by highly qualified expat consultants on short missions doing on-the-job training and bedside teaching’*⁹

Even with non-expert volunteers, however, Lough’s work concludes that short term volunteer placements can play an important role in building ‘bridging social capital’ i.e. forming useful connections with other communities.¹⁰ In a forthcoming chapter on international volunteering, Lough argues that volunteerism in itself is a sufficiently powerful concept to become a vehicle for change, even where it is implemented in the short term. *‘In a practical development context, transnational volunteers even in the short term highlight a relational way of working in development that can be more locally accountable and may contribute to key development benchmarks like the Millennium Development Goals and capacity development.’*¹¹ Short term exchanges are also *‘seen as a catalyst for longer-term thinking and activism.’*¹²

A recent evaluation of Australia Volunteers for International Development (AVID) examined relatively high skilled placements of varying length and concluded that longer term assignments

⁷ Lough et al, op cit, p121.

⁸ Geert Laleman et al. ‘The contribution of international health volunteers to the health workforce in sub-Saharan Africa, *Human Resources in Health* 2007 5(19)p 5.

⁹ Ibid, p6.

¹⁰ Lough et al, op. cit. p135.

¹¹ Benjamin Lough et al., ‘Chapter 11: Stipended international volunteering: a hybrid type’, in *Palgrave Research Handbook of Volunteering and Nonprofit Associations* (in press), p24.

¹² VOSESA, *Models of International Volunteering: Trends, Innovation and Good Practice*, Comhlámh, 2013, p9.

tend to be more successful.¹³ However, the evaluation also found that, in certain situations, short term assignments were more appropriate, and gave a model for the sequencing of short term with longer-term placements (discussed further in Part Three of this report). Perhaps the most robust defence of short term volunteering in the published literature is provided by Louise Ackers in her paper drawing on her evaluations of North-South health links for the NHS, which argues that shorter, more frequent repeat volunteer placements are actually more effective in knowledge transfer and capacity building than longer once-off stays.¹⁴

One of the most important pieces of grey literature for consideration in this report has been the interim report of the ongoing Valuing Volunteering research by VSO, as it gives a valuable insight into the unique qualities of the volunteer relationship.

‘...whilst the volunteer’s primary task is the transfer and sharing of skills, this relies heavily on building a more equal and trusting relationship with their counterparts – particularly important if these skills are to be sustained in the future. Such relationships can create a safe space within which counterparts feel secure and encouraged to consider and discuss their own ideas and implement change.’¹⁵

The above quote highlights the challenge of considering short term placements for VSO, and it is very welcome that, in the final draft of the interim report, Valuing Volunteering propose the following question for research in the second year: *‘Are volunteers on short term (3 months or less) placements able to build and work through relationships in the same way as volunteers on long-term (1yr or more) placements?’¹⁶*

This research, therefore, does not just lay out the pros and cons of implementing short term volunteer placements, but strives to understand what methods and models can be used to ensure that short term volunteering contributes fully to the type of partnership that VSO requires.

¹³ Andrew Hawkins et al, *Evaluation of the Australian Volunteers for International Development (AVID) program*, Office of Development Effectiveness, January 2014, p54

¹⁴ Helen Louise Ackers ‘Mobilities and Knowledge Transfer: Understanding the Contribution of Volunteer Stays to North–South Healthcare Partnerships’ *International Migration*, 2012.

¹⁵ VSO Valuing Volunteering interim report, February 2014, p7.

¹⁶ Ibid, p8.

Part Two: Reflections on short term volunteering

Advantages of short term volunteering

If we accept that, in general, sustainable capacity building is more readily facilitated by long term volunteering, why should we even consider short term volunteering? The obvious answer is: **it is easier to fill short term placements.** However, that is not the only benefit. ‘*As countries develop more, have more internal resources, the profile of volunteers needed increases.*’ (VSO Country Director). **Offering short term placements increases the likelihood that VSO can attract highly experienced and senior individuals.** As previously quoted, a study of international health volunteers in sub-Saharan Africa found that a focus group of African doctors expressed negative views towards health volunteers who were junior and inexperienced, but welcomed senior consultants, even on short missions.¹⁷

For long term placements, there is a relatively narrow window of opportunity within which potential volunteers have the necessary experience for a VSO placement, but do not yet have too many commitments including mortgages, family and career. One short term VSO volunteer at St Francis Hospital, commenting on the fact that the volunteers in St Francis all appeared to be quite senior in their specialities, said that to take two years out at this point in his career would be ‘*CV suicide*’, but that he was senior enough to be able to negotiate the two weeks off three times a year required for the St Francis project. Another St Francis volunteer is retired from his public service career, but still works as a part-time consultant, making it easy for him to take the time off.

Provided that short term volunteers are sufficiently senior, there may also be an argument that **short term placements minimise the risk of being drawn into service delivery.** The **recent AVID** evaluation commented that: ‘*Volunteers interviewed in the case study countries often said that the most challenging aspect of their assignment was balancing the host organisation’s need for immediate capacity (i.e. asking or expecting the volunteer to do things for the organisation) with the imperative to support the host organisation’s learning (i.e.*

¹⁷ Geert Laleman et al. ‘The contribution of international health volunteers to the health workforce in sub-Saharan Africa, *Human Resources in Health* 2007 5(19)

*asking or expecting the host organisation to let the volunteer ‘do with’ them).*¹⁸ This was reiterated by a respondent in St Francis, who spoke of the risk, common in many understaffed healthcare departments in developing countries¹⁹, that volunteers would be pushed into service delivery and end up working alone, without a local counterpart, and highlighted that this *‘doesn’t happen with short term volunteers.’*

Short term volunteering can also help cover a greater range of specialities. If, as this report recommends, short term volunteer placements are primarily operated along long term placements, short term placements can play a valuable role in providing a particular specialist skill – *‘you can’t always get everything from one person’* (VSO staff member). In St Francis, this is implemented on a particularly grand scale, with sixteen short term volunteers covering every department in the hospital, both clinical and administrative, led by two long term volunteers. However, a more organic approach – where a long term volunteer works with their host organisation to identify gaps and recruit a short term person – was also identified as a useful possibility.

Having short term as well as long term placements **may also increase the numbers of Irish volunteers abroad, thus raising Irish Aid’s profile in the wider world.** Irish Aid have in the past year funded VSO programmes including volunteer costs, but would like to see more of those placements filled by Irish volunteers. While this may not be of importance directly to the communities which VSO serves, it is indirectly important in two ways: firstly, because **Irish Aid are more likely to continue funding programmes which have Irish volunteers** and secondly, because **increased numbers of Irish volunteers can act as public ambassadors within Ireland for global development and volunteering for development.** KOICA, the Korean official aid agency, increased the numbers of volunteers sent four-fold in the past five years.²⁰ They explain that their volunteer programme has helped KOICA greatly in their public relations, as the public are interested by the volunteer, as much as the project, finding *‘the human story much more touching’*. (KOICA staff, Tanzania). The presence

¹⁸ Andrew Hawkins et al, *Evaluation of the Australian Volunteers for International Development (AVID) program*, Office of Development Effectiveness, January 2014, p48.

¹⁹ See e.g. Paul Moore and Marian Surgenor, *The Ugandan Maternal and Newborn Hub Sustainable Volunteering Programme Risk Analysis* July 2012 for a discussion of the difficulties of lone working.

²⁰ KOICA Annual Reports.

of volunteers acts as a concrete manifestation of overseas aid, making it more visible and tangible to the Korean public. As well as simply having more public ambassadors, having short term volunteers may add a new dimension to development advocacy. A survey of 49 returned VSO volunteers in the UK found that many RVs had either taken up VSO placements in pursuit of a career in development or had decided post-placement to take up development roles. The research found that: *'RVs now working for a diaspora group organisation or an international charity/ NGO, for example, feel that this is sufficient involvement in development awareness. They expressed little interest in getting involved in additional activities. Many also noted that they simply did not have the time to do so.'*²¹ Short term volunteers who return to their original professions may be able to reach a different audience and provide a different perspective.

There may also be an argument that **short term volunteering plays to Ireland's strengths**. As a small country, Ireland will always be at a disadvantage in terms of numbers. There are some 260 fully qualified consultant paediatricians in Ireland, compared to nearly 5,000 in the UK, for example.²² By including short term volunteering, we increasing the potential numbers of volunteers in that small pool, as we have highlighted above. We can also speculate that Ireland's small population works to its advantage in that the Irish are often exceptionally good at building social capital. Our history as colonised rather than colonisers mitigates some of the emotional baggage of being a Northerner in the Global South and we have a reputation in the wider world for being welcoming and approachable. Our small population and relatively informal ways of working mean that the Irish tend to be well-networked, often with enviable levels of access to our political and social leaders. As mentioned above, Lough et al. stress the role that short term volunteers can play in building social capital. Some of the attributes of the Irish mentioned above may also be helpful in allowing trusting relationships to develop more quickly.

²¹ Clare Bentall et al, Returned Volunteers and Engagement with Development: Final Report for VSO Longitudinal Study, July 2010.

²² Based on Barncat's 2013 research for VSO on the healthcare professions. This is just by way of illustration - the numbers in specialist training in both cases, and the fact that Northern Ireland is part of VSO Ireland's remit are not taken into consideration.

Ensuring maximum impact of short term volunteers

Based on the above, we can conclude that there a number of good reasons for VSO consider short term volunteering. However, as discussed at the outset, the greatest concern with short term volunteering is that six months or less is simply not enough time to build relationships and have a meaningful impact. To explore this fully, each stage of the short term volunteer placement needs to be examined in turn, beginning with screening and training; moving to the length of time it takes a volunteer to start making an impact; from there, the extent of the impact that they can make while present and finally, the sustainability of the impact once the volunteer has left.

Selection and training

There are a number of competing and perhaps even contradictory factors to consider when selecting and training short term volunteers. On the one hand, it should be possible to streamline the process for short term volunteers. Peace Corps Response identify the short turnaround time for their short term placements (3 months as against up to 12 months for long term volunteers) as one of the great advantages of the Response programme. A shorter application process also eliminates the danger that the role description will no longer be relevant by the time a volunteer is in post, discussed further in 'settling-in' below. On the other hand, given the short length of time that the volunteer has to adapt and start making an impact, there is an even greater onus on VSO to ensure that they are selecting the right person and training them well.

It is worth noting that VSO's new recruiting system and increased focus on on-line training will presumably streamline the process for both short and long term volunteers – allowing volunteers to apply directly for a specific position is perhaps particularly valuable for short term positions. However, in order to ensure short term volunteers are effective, VSO should consider certain 'cross-cultural' pre-requisites. For example, Peace Corps Response require either previous Peace Corps experience or ten years' professional experience – but in practice, they prefer candidates with either previous overseas experience, or experience in working with diverse groups within the United States. Similarly, a long term volunteer at St Francis felt that short term candidates did not necessarily have to have development experience to exhibit cross-cultural competencies, describing one short term volunteer who had worked extensively with multinational companies, and had therefore learned ways of interacting with culturally different work styles. It should be

remembered, however, that cross-cultural experience does not necessarily equate to ‘cross-cultural competencies’ of the type that VSO wish to encourage; respondents should be encouraged, at pre-selection phone interview stage and on assessment, to elaborate on how they handled their cross-cultural encounters.

If numbers of short term volunteers increase, it may also be possible to streamline selection by tailoring it more to short term volunteers – one short term VSO volunteer at St Francis informed us that he considered the dental inspection and spousal impact statement unnecessary and inappropriate for the length of time he was going to be away. However, any moves to streamline training for short term volunteers should be considered with caution. One short term volunteer, who had over ten years’ experience in living in a developing country, explained how much she appreciated the VSO training in terms of her understanding *‘of getting people to implement change (themselves). Projects in other hospitals that I volunteered in just fizzled out, but if I had used the VSO approach, it might have worked better.’* (VSO short term volunteer).

Impact during stay

VSO and other long term volunteering sending agencies tend to find that it can take a long period – sometimes up to six months for a volunteer to settle in and begin making an impact. How, then, can short term volunteers hope to bypass this process?

One argument is that settling-in takes that long for two year volunteers simply because they can afford the time. This point was made in relation to St Francis, and is echoed here in a comment on NHS North-South health volunteering links: *‘...the majority have only been for one week. Now you might think that this is terrible and a lot of people do. I personally don't. The reason is that if you're there for three weeks you spend the first week mooching about unless things are really well planned.’*²³ While this comment relates to much shorter timeframes, at least one VSO staff member involved with shorter term placements suggested that the same may be true for VSO long-term volunteers.

²³ Professor Louise Ackers and Dr Carol Porter, *Evaluation of the NHS Perspective on Health Links with Developing Countries*, August 2011, p31.

There is also the argument made by another VSO country office that short term volunteers don't in fact need to settle in to the same extent. In terms of the volunteer's personal adaptation, there is some truth in this. It is much easier to reconcile oneself to a certain way of living and working when it is only for a few months. However, when we talk about settling-in in terms of getting to know the organisation, building relationships and implementing change, if we argue that short-term volunteers can bypass this process, we would be compromising on the VSO vision of volunteering. We must therefore look at ways of maximising the potential for equal relationships within a reduced time frame.

One solution is to place a short term volunteer alongside a long term volunteer wherever possible. The long term volunteer acts a 'cultural mediator' – introducing the short term volunteer to different ways of working, and identifying key decision-makers for them, but also extending the relationship of trust and equality that they have built up with the partner to include the short term volunteer. This is discussed further in Part Three.

Secondly, there must be limitations as to where a short term volunteer can be placed. While some country offices feel that short term volunteers can only be placed with partners with whom VSO enjoy a long-standing relationship, others have used them successfully as a 'test' volunteer for scoping exercises. In either case, short term volunteers should be placed in relatively well-developed organisations, to keep cultural and language barriers to a minimum.

It must be accepted, also, that short term volunteers will not have the time to get involved in activities unrelated to their assignment. There are different perspectives on the importance of this. In the Valuing Volunteering interim report: *'Valuing Volunteering Nepal also noted that many of the international volunteers interviewed cited examples of voluntary action outside of their formal placements...This motivation doesn't "switch-off" after work...these links and the social capital built by the volunteers can make change more holistic and long-lasting. It can also promote the idea of part-time, community based voluntary action.'* (LH, 17)²⁴ However, some country office staff interviewed for this research were felt that these types of activities were undertaken where a volunteer did not have enough to do in their formal placements, and could potentially be distracting from the overall programme objectives. *'When they stay long, they*

²⁴ Valuing Volunteering interim report, February 2014, p4.

have their own commitments...the long term volunteer becomes part of the community, but instead of changing the community, they change...it becomes “business as usual” (VSO country office staff).

Ensuring a well-defined role description, and reducing the time lapse between post design and selection may help. In the AVID evaluation: *‘Many volunteers expressed feeling lost for a substantial period of time (usually at least three months), partly because it took time to develop rapport within the organisation, but also because the reality of their assignment was different to their expectations, which made it hard for them to understand their role or where they fitted into the organisation.’*²⁵

As noted in the impact assessment of VSO’s corporate volunteering programme, volunteers can achieve a lot in a short period of time, as long as their role is well-defined and supported. However, the question remains as to how sustainable this change can be. A risk assessment of the Uganda Maternal Health Hub found that, in one hospital, their *‘experience of rapid change arising from short term volunteering interventions did not generally lead to an enduring legacy of improvement, they warmly welcomed placement of volunteers for 6-12 months as a means of achieving long-lasting improvements.’*²⁶

The difficulty of sustaining change is expressed as follows in Valuing Volunteering with regard to social capital: *‘The ability of outsider volunteers to generate social capital can also be due to the automatic credibility and even ‘celebrity status’ or simply curiosity that is sometimes afforded to them because of their nationality, race or professional expertise. On the surface this can have the positive effect of enabling the volunteer to form networks and open doors that were previously perhaps closed to the volunteer’s counterparts. However, this social capital once generated can only be sustained and lead to social change if the barriers that prevented the volunteer’s counterparts from accessing these networks and overcoming existing power dynamics in the first place are simultaneously challenged. If not then the social capital simply remains with the volunteer and leaves with them when they go and does not challenge the*

²⁵ Andrew Hawkins et al, *Evaluation of the Australian Volunteers for International Development (AVID) program*, Office of Development Effectiveness, January 2014, p54.

²⁶ Paul Moore and Marian Surgenor, *The Ugandan Maternal and Newborn Hub Sustainable Volunteering Programme Risk Analysis* July 2012, p16.

*power imbalances that are the root cause of existing inequalities.*²⁷

Impact following placement

How, then, do we ensure sustainability of change brought about by a short term placement? One important point not to lose sight of is that any volunteer, long or short term, is only part of the overall solution – a single volunteer cannot be responsible for altering power dynamics and bringing about social change, no matter how long they stay. Staff in one country office found the current partnership model ‘*a bit patronising*’ – that the partner should be able simply take the knowledge they need from the volunteer, as the volunteer is really not better placed to tackle the underlying issues than the partner itself. In fact, achieving sustainable change may also be a problem with the most actively engaged long term volunteers, as the following comment from the Valuing Volunteering research shows: ‘*For international volunteers there is also an added complication as some take on management roles which introduce significant power dynamics into working relationships and potentially builds dependence on ‘outsider’ knowledge. These volunteers can and often do achieve significant results in their host organisations but tensions and questions remain as to whether taking this kind of role is better or worse in terms of bringing about long-term sustainable change.*’²⁸

That being said, it is hard not to agree with the conclusion, supported by the literature, that long term placements are generally more successful in bringing about sustainable change. It is essential, therefore, that short term volunteer placements are not implemented on an ad hoc basis, but as part of a longer term project or plan. This is discussed further in Part Three, where models such as short term volunteering alongside longer term volunteering, repeat volunteering and short volunteer placements followed by remote support are deemed the most suitable to ensure sustainable impact.

Other considerations

The section above addressed the primary concern around short term volunteering, the ability to

²⁷ Valuing Volunteering interim report, p9.

²⁸ Simon Lewis, ‘Relationships, trust and power’ blog post 4 December 2013, available at <http://community.eldis.org/.5bc6cddf/4->

make a sustainable impact in the communities which VSO serves and made some suggestions to enhance this impact. There are also some secondary concerns which should be noted.

Cost and managerial burden

Person for person, a short term volunteer is obviously less expensive than a long term volunteer, and there may be some situations in which a shorter term placement is in fact more appropriate (more on this in Part Three). However, in situations where two or more short term volunteers are seen as an alternative to one long term volunteer for the same duration, the cost is higher in terms of selection, training, flights and visas. Cost is not the only factor – Peace Corps Uganda spoke of the difficulty of Peace Corps Response volunteers arriving out of cycle and having to ‘*assemble the world*’ to train just two people. While Response placements can be anywhere between 3 and 12 months, placement duration has increased on average by 29% since 2010²⁹. The Peace Corps Response Chief of Operations felt this was because programme officers see that the administrative burden is the same for projects of shorter or longer duration, so are tending towards designing longer placements where possible. (Interview with Peace Corps).

There is also an added burden to host organisations, as each will need to orient each new volunteer.³⁰ The impact assessment of VSO’s short term assignments programme also highlighted that short term volunteers tend to have high expectations of levels of support, because of the short time they have available.³¹

Some forms of repeat short term volunteering may alleviate both the burden of orientation and the financial costs, where the cost of the flights is offset by the reduced cost of stipend, when the volunteer is not in-country. Cluster volunteering may also reduce the time required for volunteer management, as noted by some VSO country directors in the impact assessment of the Short Term Assignment Pilot.³² Some short term volunteers may also choose to waive the stipend

²⁹ Peace Corps Response, Financial Year 2013 in Review, internal document provided by Tom Ross.

³⁰ See Benjamin J. Lough, Amanda Moore McBride and Margaret S. Sherraden ‘*Capacity Building Contributions of Short Term International Volunteers*’ in *Journal of Community Practice*, 19 (2) 120-137, 2011, p122.

³¹ Impact Assessment of VSO’s Short Term Assignments Pilot project, 2013, p21.

³² Impact Assessment of VSO’s Short Term Assignments Pilot project, 2013, p16.

altogether, given that they are often less financially dependent on it. *There would probably be more of a willingness than VSO might think among consultants to cover their living expenses if the flights were paid. (VSO short term volunteer).* In general, however, higher costs and management burdens will have to be factored in against the potential advantages of short term volunteering listed above.

Risk of supply rather than demand driven focus

One of the concerns frequently raised about short term volunteers, even by respondents in favour of short term volunteering, is that it can often be driven by the sending country supply of volunteers, rather than host organisation demand. While this is often addressed to large scale corporate and youth volunteer programmes, many of the key advantages of more general short term volunteering mentioned above – wider pool, attracting more experienced candidates - are also matters of supply, and pragmatically, demand is always balanced against supply. However, one key point stressed by one VSO country office using corporate short term volunteers is that **partner organisations should feel empowered to reject unsuitable candidates.** Paradoxically, the growth in interest in short term volunteering may actually help to balance things out – increased supply may allow partners to become more selective. Bankers without Borders have 15,000 potential volunteers registered through their website, many of whom may never be selected for a position. For every volunteer placement, Bankers without Borders does an initial shortlisting and then hands over to the host organisation who makes the final decision. The pool of potential candidates are kept engaged through regular updates and training opportunities, as well as participation in remote brainstorming sessions with host organisations, where multiple volunteers can get involved (see Bankers without Borders case study).

Moving into a more crowded space

As noted at the outset, short term volunteering is on the rise, and in embracing short term placements, VSO are moving into a more crowded marketplace. It is therefore all the more essential that VSO identify what is unique about their approach and how to maintain that even in short term placements, in line with the suggestions made above. Consideration will also need to be given to how to market that approach in short term volunteering, as short term volunteering is often equated with non-expert volunteering as discussed in the literature review above.

Part Three: Models of short term volunteering

Once-off short term volunteer placements

In general, ‘once-off’ short term volunteer placements are perhaps the least desirable model. However, there are a number of circumstances where it has been suggested that a once-off short term placement might be appropriate. AVID’s recent evaluation recommended host organisations would take on a six-month volunteer; this was suggested by in-country managers as a way to ‘test out’ the host organisation’s capacity to support a volunteer.³³ Of the three VSO country offices we spoke to, two had experience of and were in favour of using short term volunteers for scoping exercises with new partners, while the third felt that it would be inappropriate to use a short term volunteer in an organisation where a strong relationship with VSO did not already exist. Peace Corps Response Uganda also described a recent example where experienced short term volunteers, familiar with the local situation, prepared placements so that ‘*regular volunteers can come in and survive*’. Similarly, it might be most appropriate for short term scoping volunteer placements to be carried out by returned VSO long term volunteers, who would have a good grasp on VSO philosophy and practice in designing a project.

The AVID evaluation also suggested short term volunteers at the end of the project cycle, where a host organisation was ready to ‘graduate’ from having long-term volunteers, but would benefit from short term volunteer expertise on specific tasks, perhaps in exchange for acting as a mentor to newer host organisations.³⁴ While this is an interesting model, it remains at present largely theoretical, and respondents in one VSO country office were dubious about the practicality of mentoring between host organisations. It does, however, speak to the sustainability element of the debate, employing a tapering-off approach rather than an abrupt transition from long-term volunteer support to nothing.

Finally, one country office felt that offering short term placements ‘*obliges VSO to be more clear about the resources needed*’ – that an organisation might not actually need a microfinance adviser, for example, for a full two years. In general, country offices felt that while in education,

³³ Andrew Hawkins et al, *Evaluation of the Australian Volunteers for International Development (AVID) program*, Office of Development Effectiveness, January 2014, p54

³⁴ Ibid, p60.

longer term placements were necessary (with some exceptions) the fields of health and sustainable livelihoods might more comfortably accommodate short term volunteers.

Short term volunteering alongside a long term volunteer

A form of cluster volunteering, this approach has much to recommend it, and some of the benefits have been discussed in previous sections. Firstly, it fills out and complements the long term volunteer's role where a short term volunteer can be recruited to fill a specific skill gap. Peace Corps Uganda described one case where '*great synergy*' was created by placing a highly specialised malaria volunteer alongside a more generalist long term volunteer. Secondly, the long term volunteer can act as 'cultural mediator' between the short term volunteer and the host organisation. This is discussed in a 2011 evaluation of NHS North-South healthcare links, which describes it as 'anchoring' the short term volunteer. The evaluation quotes one short term volunteer who had benefited from having a British couple in situ: *she used to work in this area so people know her as well and so it makes it much more real for people. They go, 'Oh [Susan]? and we'd go, 'Yes'. They made our visit much more efficient because they went around and told the great and the good... it was much better because they'd gone round and explained so much.*³⁵

The same report also pointed to the benefits to the long-term volunteer, quoting a long term volunteer who '*talked of how much he enjoyed the exchange visits suggesting that these regular repeat visits motivated him and the people at the hospital responded better: "Things get done [when they know people are coming out]. We get an immediate response. They raise morale. ... I have been here so long it no longer has that effect. Regular visits pick people up."*³⁶ This point was echoed in interview with the Uganda Maternal Health Hub, who explained that short term volunteers placed alongside long term volunteers provided '*energy and enthusiasm*'. One short term volunteer in St Francis said that, if he were there long-term, the staff would '*get fed up with me...I'm a novelty, and the novelty would wear off.*' He went on to say that although he had been there just a week, people '*are already asking when I'm out here next. If I were here more*

³⁵ Professor Louise Ackers and Dr Carol Porter, *Evaluation of the NHS Perspective on Health Links with Developing Countries*, August 2011, p31.

³⁶ Ibid, p33.

often, maybe they wouldn't ask.'

While the short term volunteers provide a burst of momentum, the long term volunteer then provides the continuity between visits. Several respondents at St Francis pointed to the role played by the long term volunteers in following up between visits, ensuring that the momentum provided by the short term volunteers is sustained.

Cluster volunteering

Clusters of shorter-term volunteers should perhaps be employed with a bit more caution. One respondent in the NHS evaluation of North-South health links explained that initial visits with ten or more volunteers were found '*a bit overwhelming*' by local staff, and that they were planning to go out more frequently with much smaller groups.³⁷ While placing short term volunteers together might ease their cultural adjustment, it might also militate against integration into the community, particularly with larger numbers of volunteers. However, there might be potential for smaller numbers of volunteers to work on-site together. In St Francis, respondents believed it would be '*overkill*' to have all volunteers there at once, but volunteers in interlinked hospital departments argued for greater co-ordination between their on-site visits.

Repeat volunteering

Repeat volunteering seems to be primarily used in health, involving volunteers going out to host organisations on often very short visits at regular intervals over an extended period of time. The volunteering model implemented in St Francis is based on a common Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC) practice known as 'backstopping', usually undertaken by paid consultants. Short term repeat assignments are also implemented on a voluntary basis through NHS North-South health links.

In her article on mobilities and knowledge transfer, Louise Ackers refers to a '*commonly held view*' amongst her respondents that '*frequency was more significant than length of stay*'.³⁸ One

³⁷ Professor Louise Ackers and Dr Carol Porter, *Evaluation of the NHS Perspective on Health Links with Developing Countries*, August 2011, p34

³⁸ Helen Louise Ackers 'Mobilities and Knowledge Transfer: Understanding the Contribution of Volunteer

of her respondents explains: *‘I personally think that for us really long stays aren’t the issue but it’s going often and keeping up that plan of momentum, keeping going back and in the meantime substituting it with phone calls and emails and building up those relationships over a period of time. The more we go back the better the respect and trust.’*³⁹ Ackers adds: *‘In that sense, the act of return (repeat stays) conveys a highly symbolic sense of commitment and team-working in a context where frequent random visits have been characterized as a form of “voluntourism”*⁴⁰ In interview, she elaborated: *‘A lot of long term volunteers will go, do their thing and then they are never seen again...but others go back and forth, gaining more respect.’*

The main drawback of repeat volunteering in the forms described above is that it is high cost, particularly where (as in the case of St Francis, and indeed many of VSO’s projects), the location is remote. It also remains to be seen in St Francis whether all of the short term volunteers will remain available for the full three years. However, a scaled-down version of the St Francis model, perhaps involving two to three repeat volunteers alongside one long term volunteer, would certainly be worth exploring. Specific country contexts would have to be taken into consideration – for example, VSO Ethiopia explained that health volunteers would not be able to perform clinical work on two week stints, as it takes at least one month to obtain a licence to practice.

Relay volunteering

Relay volunteering is similar to repeat volunteering except that a new volunteer comes out in the place of the departing one, and volunteer placements may also be longer. The VSO short term assignment impact assessment spoke of the benefit of a gap between placements, where the partner organisation had time to try out the work of the departing volunteer, reserving any questions for the incoming volunteer – a similar approach to capacity building as the repeat model.⁴¹ However, this model is even more costly in terms of selection, training and orientation than repeat volunteering, and volunteers and managers may see more of a benefit in an overlap between volunteers, than a gap. In practice, however, arranging a handover between volunteers is not always feasible, a fact which was highlighted in interview with the Ugandan Maternal

Stays to North–South Healthcare Partnerships’ *International Migration*, 2012, p8.

³⁹ Ibid, p10.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ VSO Impact Assessment of short term assignment pilot, p19.

Health Hub team. Mostly importantly, relay volunteering does not allow the same relationships of trust to develop between volunteer and partner as in the repeat model. This could, however, be offset by use of a long term volunteer acting as an ‘anchor’ as described in the section above on short term volunteering alongside a long term volunteer. In the context of VSO’s ICS programme, the Valuing Volunteering researcher in Kenya highlights that: *‘Importantly, longer term relationships with partners and host families are maintained by placement supervisors who provide a continuous link between the three month cycles.’*⁴²

Relay volunteering has been used in combination with repeat volunteering in some of the NHS North-South health links, as described here: *We work on the general principle that every time a team goes out there will be at least one person who has been before and somebody who’s new, so we’ve got a sustainable team that is being built. Every time we go out it’s going to be a different skills mix that will be required.*⁴³ Another relay model was described by the American International Health Alliance in Ethiopia, where three nurses prepared a curriculum together and split the delivery over a number of months. *‘However it was possible because they came from the one institution and could prepare in advance and create a cohesive package.’* It would be more difficult to imagine these models in the VSO context.

Combined remote and on-site volunteering

One of the unexpected benefits from the St Francis projects has been the level of remote engagement between placements by short term volunteers with local partners, long term volunteers, the VSO project manager and other short term volunteers. While not explicitly written into their role description, many of the short term volunteers seem to be in regular contact, and host partner respondents also mentioned the benefit of being able to contact volunteers with a specific query between visits. This type of ‘arms-length’ involvement, combined with visits to build trust and relationships, seems ideal for sustainable change.

Bankers without Borders, the volunteering initiative of microfinance institute the Grameen

⁴² Simon Lewis, ‘Relationships, trust and power’ blog post 4 December 2013, available at <http://community.eldis.org/.5bc6cddf/4> -

⁴³ Helen Louise Ackers ‘Mobilities and Knowledge Transfer: Understanding the Contribution of Volunteer Stays to North–South Healthcare Partnerships’ *International Migration*, 2012, p8.

Foundation, have one of the most developed remote volunteering for development programmes. Very few of their projects have no remote component, and 50% of them are conducted completely remotely. Bankers without Borders's research does not find significant difference in client satisfaction between remote or on-site support.⁴⁴

However, Bankers without Borders typically volunteer with the Grameen Foundation itself, or with other well-established organisations in urban areas, with good internet access and staff computer literacy. This is not necessarily the case for most VSO projects. Even in St Francis, which does have internet access, levels of engagement by staff – and by some volunteers – in online activity are mixed.

Where it is possible, it would be very beneficial for VSO to explore possibilities for remote volunteering as a means of enhancing the impact of short term volunteering. However, unlike Bankers without Borders which prepare much of the groundwork remotely, this report recommends that remote volunteering should take place only after an on-site placement, to establish trust and rapport between the participants, and a more grounded understanding on the part of the volunteer. In fact, Bankers without Borders say that in Africa in particular, they get more requests for on-site and longer volunteering placements. A possible model to look at might be a three to six month placement, followed by a period of remote support from the volunteer to the partner, followed by one or two brief follow up visits.

⁴⁴ Quoted in VOSESA report, p71.

Part Four: Recommendations

Widely varying views of the potential of short term volunteering were encountered in the research, particularly as regards its place within VSO, and some of these philosophical standpoints are discussed in Part Two. To summarise, however, the conclusion of the current report is that short term skilled volunteering can be effective and in line with VSO's approach in certain situations, provided the criteria below are met.

1. Short term placements should be implemented as part of a long term plan or project. There is a general consensus that once-off placements of less than 6 months cannot create sustainable change on their own. However, some of the literature and many respondents pointed to ways in which short term volunteers can contribute to sustainable change in the context of a larger plan, as discussed in parts one and two above.

2. Short term placements should be well-defined and highly targeted. For many longer term volunteers, part of the 'settling-in' process involves refining and perhaps re-defining their job description – this is true both for VSO and other long term volunteering organisations. Short term assignments cannot afford this time lag.

3. Screening and assignment procedures should be modified for short term volunteers. One of the factors that leads to mismatch between advertised and actual assignments as described above is the length of time that it often takes to place volunteers in specific roles. Presumably the new Salesforce system will mitigate this by allowing volunteers to apply directly to short term roles, but certain parts of the procedure might also be modified specifically for short term volunteers. One short term volunteer informed us that he almost withdrew in frustration at the lengthy and (as he saw it) excessively burdensome screening process, citing the dental inspection and the spousal impact statement (which had not been tailored to shorter term assignments) as examples. On the other hand, short term volunteers must be able to adapt quickly to different cultural contexts, which should be taken into consideration in the screening process.

4. Short term volunteers should have demonstrable cross-cultural competencies. While respondents in VSO and other volunteer sending agencies stressed that some volunteers

who had never been abroad settled in easily, and that conversely, volunteers with overseas experience did not necessarily adapt to their current placement, most felt that experience working with other cultures – whether overseas or domestically – was important for short term volunteers. Screening processes should also look at the way in which these cross-cultural connections were handled by the volunteer, to determine whether his or her approach is in line with VSO’s perspective.

5. Experience requirements should be higher for short term volunteers. One of the advantages of short term placements, as discussed in the report, is that more senior professionals may be available. This should allow VSO to set the bar even higher for short term volunteers, ensuring that they are best positioned to have maximum impact.

6. Short term volunteers should be placed within organisations well-prepared to receive them. Some respondents argued that volunteers should only be placed in organisations with whom VSO have a long-standing relationship, while others reported using short term placements as a scoping exercise for new partners. In either case, however, it seems clear that short term volunteers can only be effective within relatively well-developed organisations, with some familiarity in engaging with outside expertise, to keep language and cultural barriers to a minimum. For organisations with more limited capacity, a long term volunteer will always be preferable.

7. A strong VSO support system is needed for short term volunteers, and should be placed alongside a long term volunteer wherever possible. In long term VSO placements, the relationship is primarily between the volunteer and the partner, and by living and working alongside a partner, the volunteer develops a crucial insider/outsider role, as discussed in the Valuing Volunteering research. A short term volunteer will remain to a large extent an outsider, and so a ‘cultural mediator’ is necessary, who will both establish the trust and rapport needed with the partner organisation, and lessen the culture shock felt by the volunteer. In the majority of cases, this role is best performed by a long term VSO volunteer, although some respondents argued strongly for an on-site VSO project manager, (in addition to or instead of a long term volunteer) and some respondents felt that the role could be fulfilled by a VSO country programmes manager.



8. VSO should look primarily at deploying short term volunteers in health placements. In general, respondents felt that educators were better deployed on longer placements, although there was some scope for shorter term placements in education, particularly in non-teaching roles, and views were mixed as to the success of short term volunteering for sustainable livelihoods. However, most felt that there was a place for short term health volunteers, particularly in the context of delivering very specific capacity building inputs.

9. VSO should actively consider incorporating elements of repeat and remote volunteering models into their programmes. The recommendations above are aimed at ensuring maximum impact from short term volunteer placements, even where they are being introduced as a practical alternative due to difficulties in filling longer term placements. However, models of short term volunteering which introduce a level of continuity, such as repeat or on-site/remote volunteering can greatly increase the potential for effective change, and indeed several respondents argued were *more* effective in creating sustainable change than long-term placements. For example, an initial 3-6 month placement, followed by six months to a year where the volunteer is available for consultation with the partner remotely, culminating in a 2-3 week follow up visit might be an interesting model for VSO to explore.

Appendix A: Case studies

Australia Volunteers International/AVID

Australia Volunteers for International Development (AVID) was launched in 2011, and brings together all of Australian government overseas volunteering initiatives under the same banner. It is delivered by three partners, including Australian Volunteers International (AVI), whom I spoke to as part of this research. The duration of AVID's volunteer placements is anywhere from one month to three years depending on host organisation's needs, and the level of skills required varies, but these are not exclusively youth volunteering opportunities – AVI's average volunteer age was 42 in 2012/2013, as against Peace Corps' average age of 28.⁴⁵ An independent evaluation of the AVID programme has just been published.⁴⁶ As discussed in the report, this evaluation concluded that long term volunteers are more effective than short term volunteers in terms of achieving long-term capacity: *'The fieldwork found instances where capacity development had been achieved; these were always at the end of a two-year assignment, with a particularly talented volunteer in a reasonably sustainable organisation.'*⁴⁷ The report suggested that shorter-term assignments could be used at the beginning of a partner project. *'Some host organisations and volunteers were reluctant to commit to longer-term assignments (24 months or more) without testing the relationship. In-country managers also said that longer-term assignments may not be appropriate for host organisations taking on their first volunteer; these managers often wanted to use shorter assignments of around six months duration to 'test out' the organisation.'*⁴⁸ Short term assignments, the report suggested, might also be used as part of an exit strategy whereby 'graduating' partners might receive short term specific supports from highly experienced volunteers, possibly acting as mentors to newer partners in exchange.

The majority of the volunteers provided by AVI to the AVID programme are long term volunteers (24 months), although occasionally a 12 month role is requested or negotiated if the best person

⁴⁵ <http://www.peacecorps.gov/about/fastfacts/>

⁴⁶ Andrew Hawkins et al, *Evaluation of the Australian Volunteers for International Development (AVID) program*, Office of Development Effectiveness, January 2014.

⁴⁷ Ibid, p54.

⁴⁸ Ibid, p54.



Community Strategy & Research

for the role is only available for a shorter time. AVI are involved in a number of partnerships with organizations, where they help them develop and run much shorter term volunteer programme for staff and students. For example, with Macquarie University, good outcomes are ensured by *'long term planning and commitment to regular short term placements.'* (AVI Co-ordinator). An example given was of an indigenous rights group in Sabah, Malaysia, who receive groups of law or geography students twice a year to help with community mapping and data gathering for land rights claims. Because they work within the university holidays, they know exactly when the volunteers will be there, and *'the partner can plan field trips out to communities well in advance knowing that they will have 8 law students there to assist them who will all have at least a baseline of relevant skills.'* (AVI Co-ordinator).

Bankers without Borders

The Bankers without Borders (BwB) initiative places volunteers with Grameen Foundation and other client projects in consultant type roles for periods ranging from 2 weeks to 6 months. There is also a fellowship programme which places volunteers for 12 months in the field. There is a fluid model around costs and stipends – many employers choose to cover the costs of employees volunteering, and the Grameen Foundation may also cover expenses such as airfare, visas etc. Sometimes volunteers cover their own airfares, and may even contribute part of their project’s budget, and finally the partner organisations themselves pay a fee (though considerably below market rates for a consultant), and also may contribute by providing meals and accommodation for longer term stays. The Regional Officer for Africa feels that this participation by both volunteer and partner organisation leads to less dependence by both parties on Bankers without Borders. Clients also conduct interviews from a shortlist compiled by Bankers without Borders and make the final decision on the volunteer that best suits their needs.

50% of projects are done completely remotely (online), while the remaining 50% are either on site or a combination of remote and on-site volunteering. The Bankers without Borders Regional Officer for Africa explained that very few projects have no remote element, and those that do are mostly longer term projects. For short term placements, the volunteer usually has significant contact with the project remotely both before and after the project, which allows them to achieve their goals more rapidly once on site. Bankers without Borders’s research does not find significant difference in client satisfaction between remote or on-site support⁴⁹, although in Africa particularly, they get more requests for on-site and longer term placements.

Bankers without Borders have over 15,000 volunteers registered on their site, so they have developed strategies for engaging registered volunteers – access to online education materials, ‘visioning sessions’ with client organisations using Google hangout, fundraising, mapping exercises and campaigns – allowing BwB to maintain their network of registered volunteers, ‘which is crucial to its ability to be responsive to client organisations’⁵⁰

The ‘visioning’ or ‘ideation’ sessions are interesting as a cluster volunteering concept – BwB refer

⁴⁹ Quoted in VOSESA report, p71.

⁵⁰ Quoted in VOSESA report, p72.



Community Strategy & Research

to it as ‘crowdsourcing’. Bankers without Borders offer it as a free service to clients, either to get them started with BwB, or as ‘added value’ to an established client. Eight to fifteen volunteers participate in a 90 minute online brainstorming session with the client, following which the client may either have come up with workable solutions they can implement on their own, or may be able to refine a project for which they can then employ a BwB volunteer. Volunteers are also sometimes placed as a team and sometimes a remote volunteer works in conjunction with an on-site volunteer.

BwB stress the importance of having highly targeted and well defined tasks in order for the short term placements to work, and the ‘ideation’ sessions can help in this respect, as well as the remote work carried out by the volunteer before arriving on-site. To help the volunteer acclimatise rapidly, BwB match new volunteers with a peer mentor, who has volunteered with BwB in similar circumstances.

The Regional Officer for Africa felt that while short term placements could be excellent for tasks such as training needs, human capital assessment and management information systems assessments, organisational development project and policy work –which involves establishing relationships – is more suited to longer term placements. I asked about the concern that arises in ‘Valuing Volunteering’ around balance of power between ‘expert’ volunteers and partner organisations, and she felt that this effect is mitigated by the fact that BwB recruit from both the South and the North for volunteers.

Peace Corps Response

While the Peace Corps flagship programme consists of two year overseas placements, often of recent graduates, Peace Corps Response (PCR) consists of high impact, 3-12 month placements for experienced professionals. PCR volunteers' average age is 38, ten years more than the average Peace Corps volunteer.

Peace Corps Response (PCR) has its origins in Crisis Corps, a programme whereby returned Peace Corps volunteers served on shorter term assignments in response to emergencies overseas. Peace Corps Response was then established in 2007, which broadened out from response work to more general short term development work. In 2012, Peace Corps Response was expanded to include not only returned long term Peace Corps volunteers, but any professional with at least ten years' experience. 2012 also saw the launch of the Global Health Service Partnership, a joint initiative between Peace Corps, the US President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR) and Seed Global Health, which is run under the Peace Corps Response umbrella. This deploys health professionals with at least three years' experience in their clinical specialty on 12 month placements in Uganda, Tanzania and Malawi, with the first cohort placed in July 2013.

Suitable PCR placements are identified through the Peace Corps programming processes in host countries. Tom Ross explained that Peace Corps regional and country staff go through a long process of identifying partners and projects in-country that fit with Peace Corps programmatic areas and objectives. In the course of these conversations, ideas for placements arise that cannot always be catered for in the main Peace Corps programme, and Peace Corps Response is able to 'fill the gap' in this regard. Country offices have freedom and flexibility to decide how and where to implement placements. For Peace Corps Uganda, Response volunteers have mostly worked in preparing placements for long-term volunteers, although one example of a specialist Response volunteer working alongside a short term volunteer was cited. Country offices can also specify the desired placement length and set their own criteria – for example, while the general Response criteria is either previous Peace Corps experience or ten years' professional experience, Peace Corps Uganda always stipulate previous overseas experience (not necessarily with Peace Corps). Sometimes they may have a particular candidate in mind, and the flexibility of the Response model allows them to tailor the job description accordingly.

One of the advantages of Peace Corps Response is that candidates apply directly for a specific job in a specific country and the application process is much shorter. For a Peace Corps posting, the application process takes on average 7 to 12 months, following which volunteers are deployed in a group for 3 months of in-country training. While volunteers know the programme area in which they will serve (e.g. health, community development), it is only after in-country training that they are matched with their placement. For PCR, positions are advertised online and it can take as little as 3 months to fill a role.

Since the programme expansion, there have been some 50 volunteers without previous Peace Corps experience. Tom Ross agreed that returned Peace Corps Volunteers had the advantage in already possessing ‘cross-cultural competencies’ prior to being placed in the field, but that it was not a major hurdle – many non-returned volunteers thrived in their placements, just as some returned Peace Corps volunteers may have struggled. PCR have, however, refined their interview questions to better assess the ability of a candidate to adapt by enquiring about their experience in working overseas, or with diverse populations within the US. While the standard PCR orientation is just 3-5 days, PCR volunteers without previous PC experience have 2 weeks’ orientation. They are also working on ways to better integrate PCR volunteers, particularly those who are not returned volunteers, into the Peace Corps community in-country.

While PCR placements can be anywhere between 3 and 12 months, placement duration has increased on average by 29% since 2010.⁵¹ Tom Ross feels this is because programme officers see that the administrative burden is the same for projects of shorter or longer duration, so are tending towards designing longer placements where possible. Placements are quite frequently extended, also, although a placement can never be extended by more than its original length e.g. a 4 month placement can be extended by a maximum 4 further months, so as not to ‘lose focus’ (Peace Corps Uganda).

⁵¹ Peace Corps Response, Financial Year 2013 in Review, internal document provided by Tom Ross.

Uganda Maternal Health Hub/Liverpool-Mulago Partnership

The Liverpool-Mulago Partnership (LMP) is a formal twinning partnership between Mulago Maternity Referral Hospital in Kampala, and Liverpool Women's NHS Foundation Trust – the two biggest maternity units in Africa and Europe respectively, according to the LMP's website. The website stresses the two-way nature of learning in the partnership, Mulago providing opportunities for the study of clinical management of advanced pathology, and Liverpool training opportunities in high technology medicine. It is one of a number of healthcare partnerships (HCPs) that exist between UK hospital and those in developing countries, and in 2011, LMP received funding to lead the Uganda Maternal Health Hub, a network of several HCPs with Uganda in obstetrics.

In the 2012 paper provided by Prof Ackers⁵², she described two main exchanges facilitated within the Liverpool-Mulago Partnership. The Clinical Exchange Scheme consisted of 2-3 week bilateral visits, and were complemented by 12 month visits by British doctors under the Eleanor Bradley Fellowship. Both programmes have now been largely superseded by the Sustainable Volunteering Project (SVP) which forms part of the Hub programme, and aims to place UK professional volunteers in Uganda for placements of between 6 and 24 months. It is funded by THET under the same long term volunteering scheme as VSO's maternal health scheme in Malawi. Placements under the scheme are a minimum of 6 months as stipulated by THET = and of the 16 SVP placements in 2012-13, 12 were 6 months or shorter.⁵³ James Ackers-Johnson confirmed that this is due to volunteer preference – they had originally envisaged that volunteers would stay a full year, as had been the model under the Eleanor Bradley Fellowship. However, as interest grows in the volunteer programme, they may be able to choose candidates willing to undertake longer term placements. Most of their volunteers are relatively junior, still undergoing training.

James Ackers-Johnson felt that longer stays were preferable, saying that while long term

⁵² Helen Louise Ackers 'Mobilities and Knowledge Transfer: Understanding the Contribution of Volunteer Stays to North-South Healthcare Partnerships' *International Migration*, 2012.

⁵³ Sustainable Volunteering Project: Supporting Sustainable and Effective Professional Voluntarism, Annual Report, March 2013.



Community Strategy & Research

volunteer placements are designed according to identified partner need, short term placements are more supply driven, although must be in line with the programme's objectives. The SVP flyer says that '*Shorter voluntary placements are welcome but unfortunately cannot be funded at this time*', and James Ackers-Johnson confirmed that there are still a number of short term volunteers who are self-funded and are always placed alongside a long term volunteer.

The overall co-ordinator of the Ugandan Maternal Health Hub, however, Professor Ackers, who was subsequently interviewed by phone, holds that frequent, short term volunteer placements may in fact be more effective than longer term, less frequent or one-off placements, and has written a number of evaluations and an academic paper on this point, as discussed in this report.

World Friends Korea

World Friends Korea is the volunteering arm of KOICA, (Korea International Cooperation Agency). They have a number of programmes varying in expertise level and duration, but the two which we are concerned with are World Friends Advisers (six month to one year placements for volunteers with ten years' or more experience) and Korea Senior Experts (one year placements for volunteers over 50 with at least ten years' experience in their field). In 2012, KOICA sent a total of 4,068 volunteers to 55 countries, recording the second largest number of volunteers dispatched by a government (after the United States).⁵⁴

A 2011 evaluation of World Friends Korea by the office of the Prime Minister found that these two senior programs gained highest satisfaction compared to other programmes, including the long term ones.⁵⁵ Miyoung Seo, Manager of the World Friends Coordination Team feels that this is because: *'Partner organizations tend to highly appreciate the experience and know-how of seniors.'* However, this was somewhat contradicted by the KOICA office in Tanzania, who said that the organisations there mostly preferred younger volunteers, as language and cultural barriers tended to be less problematic.

Both KOICA Tanzania and Miyoung Seo pointed to a partner preference for longer term placements. Miyoung Seo said *'World Friends Advisers and Korea Senior Experts programs are designed to work for 6 months or 1 year with a possibility of extension for no more than total 3 years. According to the statistics, we receive requests for mission extension from more or less half partner organizations out of our all partners. It implies that partner organizations are likely to prefer longer term placement rather than short term. In addition, the survey based evaluations results which are conducted every year also shows that partner organizations think that 6 month mission is too short to work with. They stress impact of sustained support.'* This was supported by KOICA Tanzania, who said that *'no-one wants short term volunteers'* and felt that: *'short term volunteering was focused on the experience to the volunteer'* rather than the impact to the partner. The exception they made was for highly qualified consultants, acting as World Friends Advisers, as KOICA finds it hard to find long-term consultants to work in the field.

⁵⁴ KOICA Annual Report 2012, p105.

VSO, St Francis Referral Hospital, Ifakara

VSO's volunteer intervention in St Francis is funded by the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC), and complements their simultaneous buildings project. Two long term volunteers are supplemented by fifteen short term volunteers, each visiting for two weeks three times a year over the three years of the project, plus one M&E short term volunteer for four weeks at the end of the project. This model was designed by SDC, and is frequently used by them in their development work – the repeat short term advisers are referred to as 'backstoppers' and are generally paid consultants. A paid consulting model was originally envisaged in St Francis, but VSO won an open tender with their proposal to staff the project using volunteers.

Respondents, including short term and long term volunteers, VSO country office staff and hospital staff, are generally positive about the model. Many respondents, as highlighted in this report, stressed the positive effects of having a repeat model, whereby a relationship of trust is built up, but that implementation is left to the hospital staff themselves. The two weeks was felt to be enough to achieve results, as the burst was so short to allow the volunteer to '*throw everything into it*', frequently working through the weekend, and debating the issues with other volunteers in the evenings. The short term volunteers were enthusiastic, and generally felt that the hospital was particularly receptive to this type of intervention. One long term volunteer stressed the importance of each volunteer having a direct counterpart within the hospital, feeling was key to the success of the St Francis model - although a volunteer in a relationship that was often cited as an example of success warned: '*I am paired with the person on the ground who is most committed, and I still sometimes have problems...*' (VSO volunteer).

One dissenting view came from a senior hospital doctor who felt that two weeks' stints were too short, and was sceptical about the prospect of long-lasting change after the end of the project, citing previous interventions by SDC which in his view had not led to sustainable impact. His outlook on the possibility for transformative change was perhaps generally very negative, however, as when asked how long he thought the VSO intervention should continue, he replied '*VSO should stay for life*'.

As might be expected from such a new model for VSO, there were some initial difficulties with the recruitment process. As previously discussed, one volunteer said that he almost withdrew in



frustration at the cumbersome selection process, which he felt was insufficiently tailored to the short term requirements. One of the long term volunteers said that he was recruited very rapidly, but was never informed that there would be short term volunteers working alongside him, still less that it would be part of his role to support their work.

As discussed in the report, the remote working element was an unexpected bonus, and seemed to be a significant factor in the project's success. While volunteers stayed in touch on an *ad hoc* basis, several volunteers wished that visits were better co-ordinated between volunteers on relevant teams, and that there was an online forum where they could co-ordinate plans and discuss implementation – at present, all volunteers reports are uploaded to a shared Dropbox, but there are no facilities for shared conversations online.

Given that the initial model was for the work to be delivered by paid consultants, respondents were questioned as to whether there were any advantages (beyond cost) of an unpaid model. One response was that hospital staff might trust volunteers more as their '*motivations are more pure*', which was echoed by VSO country office staff who felt '*volunteers are more motivated to support poor people*' and are '*much more accepted by the partner*'. The importance of the VSO approach in facilitating, rather than imposing change is not to be underestimated, as illustrated by the volunteer quoted earlier in the report, who felt that VSO training gave her '*an understanding of getting people to implement change*' that was absent in her previous volunteer experience.

Appendix B: List of interviews conducted

1. Becky Murray, Head of Accountability and Impact Team, VSO International.
2. Katie Turner, Global Research and Advocacy Advisor, Volunteering for Development, VSO International
3. Catherine Rubbens, Corporate Employee Volunteering Advisor, VSO International
4. Clive Ingleby, Programme Development Adviser - Health, VSO International
5. Peter Barnard, Country Director, VSO Uganda
6. Lillian Viko, Education Programmes Manager, VSO Uganda
7. Moses Olwenyi, Health Programmes Manager, VSO Uganda
8. Ian Evans, VSO long term volunteer, Uganda
9. Jean de Wetter, Country Director, VSO Tanzania
10. Douglas Taylor, Education Programmes Manager, VSO Tanzania
11. Stellah Mdahila, VSO Project Manager for St Francis Hospital, Ifakara
12. Birgit Koenig, VSO long term volunteer, St Francis, Ifakara
13. David Hooper, VSO long term volunteer, St Francis, Ifakara
14. Tony Surgit Sarma, VSO short term volunteer, St Francis, Ifakara
15. Michael Donovan, VSO short term volunteer, St Francis, Ifakara
16. Rona Breese, VSO short term volunteer, St Francis, Ifakara
17. Meshack Lubeleje, Director of Nursing (Patron), St Francis Hospital, Ifakara
18. Dr Mbata, Head of Internal Medicine, St Francis *N.B. Dr Mbata was deputised to meet us on behalf of Dr Nyantema, Medical Director at St Francis who was called away on business while we were there.*
19. Irene Owgawa, Regional Selection and Induction, Horn and East Africa
20. Valencia Mabuella, Regional Selection and Induction, Southern Africa
21. Tom Ross, Chief of Operations, Peace Corps Response Programme
22. Dilana Martinez, Program Specialist, Peace Corps
23. Paul Sully, Director, Programming and Training , Peace Corps Uganda
24. Loucine Hayes, Country Director, Peace Corps Uganda
25. James Ackers-Johnson, Sustainable Volunteering programme manager, Maternal Health Hub, Uganda
26. Natalie Tate, Sustainable Volunteering long term volunteer, Maternal Health Hub, Uganda.



Community Strategy & Research

27. Professor Louise Ackers, Maternal Health Hub, Uganda.
28. Eve Mungai, Regional Program Officer, Sub-Saharan Africa, Bankers without Borders
29. Mi Young Seo Manager of World Friends Coordination Team, Korean International Cooperation Agency (KOICA).
30. Shinyong Pyeon, Deputy Representative, KOICA Tanzania Office
31. Kim Sungsoo, Volunteer Coordinator, KOICA Tanzania Office
32. Treaisa Rowe, Australia Volunteers International (AVI).
33. Catherine Gunby, Deputy Director, VSO Ethiopia
34. Claire McCue, VSO short term volunteer, Axum Hospital, Ethiopia
35. Kidest Hailu, Country Director, American International Health Alliance, Ethiopia.
36. Sara Haile, Senior Program Manager, American International Health Alliance, Ethiopia.

Appendix C: Bibliography

Professor Louise Ackers and Dr Carol Porter, *Evaluation of the NHS Perspective on Health Links with Developing Countries*, August 2011.

Helen Louise Ackers 'Mobilities and Knowledge Transfer: Understanding the Contribution of Volunteer Stays to North–South Healthcare Partnerships' *International Migration*, 2012.

Australian Volunteers International, Annual Report 2012/2013.

Clare Bentall et al, Returned Volunteers and Engagement with Development: Final Report for VSO Longitudinal Study, July 2010.

Gib Bulloch, Executive Director, Accenture Development Partnerships, 'Volunteering for Development', European Development Days 2013, Wednesday 27 November 2013 - 14:30 PM - 15:45 PM (podcast)

John Cape, 'The Value of Short term Volunteerism' in *Monthly Developments Magazine* (June 2012, Vol. 30, Issue 6).

Comhlahm, The Impact of Volunteering on Host Organisations: a summary of research conducted in India and Tanzania, 2007.

Peter Devereux, 'International volunteering for development and sustainability: outdated paternalism or a radical response to globalism?' *Development in Practice* Vol. 18, Iss. 3, 2008 p.360

Andrew Hawkins et al, Volunteering for international development – approaches and impact, Ausaid, 2013

Andrew Hawkins et al, *Evaluation of the Australian Volunteers for International Development (AVID) program*, Office of Development Effectiveness, January 2014.

HSE Global Health and ESTHER Alliance, Report on staff survey, January 2013.

Impact Assessment of VSO's Short Term Assignments Pilot project, 2013.

John James, Chris Minett, and Liz Ollier, *Evaluation of links between North and South Healthcare Organisations*, DFID Health Resource Centre, 2008.

Geert Laleman, Guy Kegels, Bruno Marchal, Dirk Van der Roost, Isa Bogaert and Wim Van Damme, 'The contribution of international health volunteers to the health workforce in sub-Saharan Africa, *Human Resources in Health* 2007 5(19)

Benjamin Lough and Lenore Matthew, *Measuring and Conveying the Added Value of International Volunteering* Forum discussion paper 2013

Benjamin J. Lough, Amanda Moore McBride and Margaret S. Sherraden 'Capacity Building

Contributions of Short Term International Volunteers' in *Journal of Community Practice*, 19 (2) 120-137, 2011.

Benjamin Lough et al., 'Chapter 11: Stipended international volunteering: a hybrid type', in *Palgrave Research Handbook of Volunteering and Nonprofit Associations* (in press), p24.

Pat McCloughan, *New Evidence on Overseas Volunteering from Ireland and its Socio-Economic Impact in Ireland*, Comhlámh, 2013.

Shannon Maynard, *Volunteerism: An Old Concept, a New Model for Scaling Microfinance and Technology-for-Development Solutions*, Grameen Foundation, 2010.

Paul Moore and Marian Surgenor, *The Ugandan Maternal and Newborn Hub Sustainable Volunteering Programme Risk Analysis* July 2012

Peace Corps Office of Strategic Planning, Information and Research, *Host Country Impact Study: Tanzania*, 2010.

Peace Corps Office of Inspector General, *Final Program Evaluation Report Peace Corps/Uganda*, July 2012.

Helene Perold, Lauren Graham, Eddy Mazembo Mavungu, Karena Cronin, Learnmore Muchemwa and Benjamin Lough, 'The colonial legacy of international voluntary service' in *Community Development Journal*, April 2013 Vol 48 Issue 3, p179-196.

Sustainable Volunteering Project: Supporting Sustainable and Effective Professional Voluntarism, Annual Report, March 2013.

UNV/UNDP, *State of the World's Volunteerism Report*, 2011.

VOSESA, *Models of International Volunteering: Trends, Innovation and Good Practice*, Comhlámh, 2013.