

developing volunteering **in east London**

changing lives shaping communities

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Foreword

Volunteers are the lifeblood of our communities and a key part of community engagement and building the Big Society. Volunteering enables people to make a positive contribution to their neighbourhood, gain new skills, build confidence and sometimes acts as a route back into employment.

Alongside the many services provided by public sector bodies and private companies, an army of unsung volunteers provides a level of help and support that may go largely unnoticed but without which the demands on public services would be untenable.

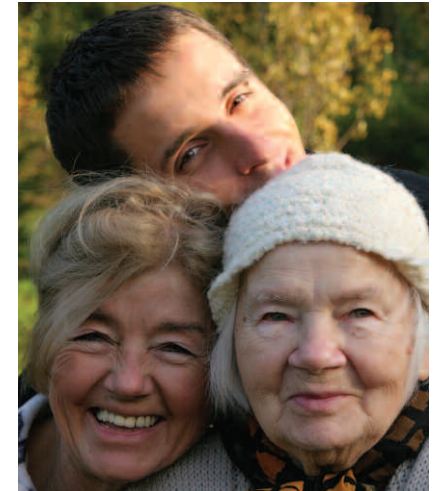
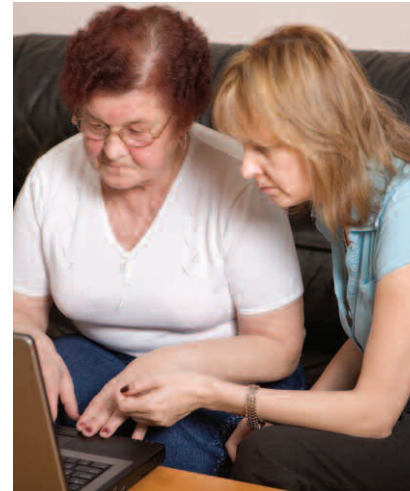
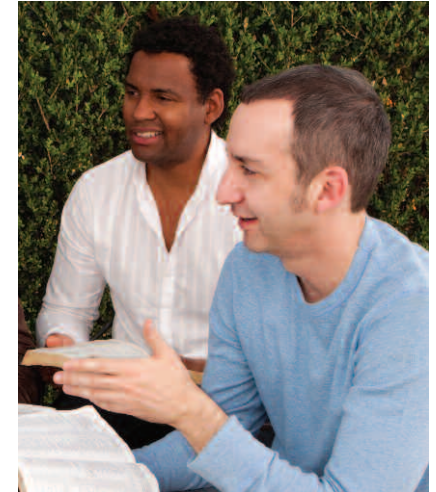
Similarly, local volunteer centres are the glue that supports, builds and promotes volunteers and volunteering involving organisations locally. They have a vested interest within the boroughs they work, developing positive and rewarding volunteering opportunities, championing good practice and helping to bring about better outcomes for local people.

The East London ChangeUp Partnership – a network of Councils for Voluntary Service, Volunteer Centres and other voluntary and community sector support organisations – exists to support services in our ten member boroughs and provide opportunities for collaboration across the sub-region. Volunteering is a major theme.

This report is just a snapshot of some of the good work taking place across the sub region but nonetheless, I hope you will find it interesting, informative, thought-provoking and a positive illustration of the support needed to build a strong, cohesive and effective Big Society.

We welcome feedback and new opportunities for partnership development in the years ahead.

Martin Howie *Chair*
East London ChangeUp Partnership



Introduction

About Volunteer Centres

Volunteer Centres are local volunteering infrastructure agencies. Their mission is to promote, develop and facilitate volunteering. There is a vibrant Volunteer Centre in each of the nine boroughs in the East London sub-region. In 2007–2008, East London Volunteer Centres had a combined income of just over £2 million, with an average income of £225,457.

Volunteer Centres help thousands of local residents to volunteer every year. They also support organisations to develop dynamic volunteering opportunities and manage their volunteer programmes. They work in partnership with colleagues in the voluntary and community sector and the public sector to develop strategic responses to volunteering, and to ensure a volunteer-friendly climate.

Volunteer Centres are accredited by Volunteering England, the national umbrella body for volunteering. Accreditation provides a guarantee of universal high quality services.

Every accredited Volunteer Centre delivers six key services:

- brokerage
- promoting and marketing
- good practice development
- developing opportunities
- policy and campaigning
- strategic development

In addition to these core functions, most Volunteer Centres run a range of volunteering projects. These typically include programmes targeting specific communities, such as young people, adults with additional support needs, or employee volunteering initiatives. During 2007–2008, Volunteer Centres in East London managed 56 projects, with each Volunteer Centre delivering an average of six projects.



Our services

Brokerage

Volunteer Centres match individuals to a comprehensive range of local volunteering opportunities. They offer potential volunteers support and advice at face-to-face appointments, over the telephone or by e-mail. They signpost potential volunteers to roles that match their skills, availability, abilities and aspirations. East London Volunteer Centres are particularly successful at helping people from disadvantaged or marginalised groups and have substantial experience of engaging with a diverse client base.

Promoting and marketing

Volunteer Centres promote volunteering locally and encourage everyone to volunteer. They are able to target specific groups and reduce barriers to volunteering. They promote volunteering through local events and at a grassroots level in community settings. Volunteer Centres take part in national volunteering campaigns and produce publicity materials. They advertise local volunteering opportunities on the national volunteering database (www.do-it.org.uk), through their own websites and via social networking sites like Facebook or Twitter.

Good practice development

Volunteer Centres promote good practice in volunteer management to organisations that involve volunteers. They offer training and advice to Volunteer Managers on how to develop and improve their volunteering programmes and manage volunteers. They help organisations to provide a healthy, safe volunteering environment that is legally compliant. Some Volunteer Centres also facilitate training for volunteers to enhance their volunteering experience.

Developing opportunities

Volunteer Centres work in close partnership with voluntary and community sector groups and statutory agencies to develop local volunteering opportunities that are dynamic, high-quality and appealing to potential volunteers. Recently, Volunteer Centres have experienced a substantial increase in the number of people wanting to volunteer. They are rising to the challenge of developing more volunteering opportunities to meet this need.

Policy and campaigning

Volunteer Centres analyse and comment on legislation and policy that affects volunteering. Because they work closely with organisations and volunteers on a daily basis, they are ideally positioned to consult and advocate. They campaign constructively for a more volunteer-friendly climate, and to ensure that volunteering is open and accessible to everyone. Volunteer Centres can represent the authentic views of the volunteering sector to policy and decision-makers.

Strategic development

Volunteer Centres are the local experts on volunteering and inform strategic thinking and planning at a local and regional level. They are usually involved in local ChangeUp consortia and Local Strategic Partnerships. They lead on volunteering issues, such as developing borough-wide Volunteering Compacts or Volunteering Strategies, and may also carry out research on volunteering.

Working together

How we can help you

- Volunteering improves lives. It can increase self-esteem and confidence, improve health and well-being, increase employability, help with rehabilitation and build social cohesion. Volunteer centres can provide support to both volunteers and volunteering involving organisations that can contribute to the success of building a strong and cohesive Big Society. Volunteer Centres can provide general and specialist help for specific target groups, such as people with mental health problems, disabled people, younger and older people, unemployed people, or parents. They can help you achieve positive outcomes for your service users.
- Volunteer Centres are the experts in the volunteering field. Consult them about local volunteering strategies, research and Compacts to harness their expertise and knowledge.
- Volunteer Centres know how to develop innovative, creative volunteering opportunities. If you want to involve volunteers in your organisation, Volunteer Centres will advise you on making your volunteering roles attractive and help find the right people to fill them.
- Volunteer Centres understand the challenges of running a well-managed volunteering programme. If you need information on managing volunteers, or legislation affecting volunteering, Volunteer Centres should be your first port of call for training or advice.

How you can help us

- Support their tried and tested services – Volunteer Centres have a track record of delivering high quality projects that have benefited thousands of residents across East London. Support the people who know how by commissioning reliable, effective projects that offer best value.
- Just like Councils for Voluntary Service, Volunteer Centres are essential infrastructure agencies. Local residents and voluntary and community sector organisations rely on and value the free services they provide. Recognise this by acknowledging and supporting them publicly.
- When funding and commissioning Volunteer Centres, think long-term. Stability and sustainability is vital. Volunteer Centres need core funding, alongside project funding. Adequate core funding allows Volunteer Centres to deliver the essentials and room to innovate.
- When looking for delivery partners, consider Volunteer Centres. They can help you to provide high quality, accessible services for local people.

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Case studies: brokerage

Brokerage: Newham Volunteer Network Centre

'I was referred to Newham Volunteer Network Centre eight months ago. I told them that I suffered from depression and lacked confidence and they were very helpful and understanding. They gave me a number of options to try out and I found a volunteering placement in two weeks.

Through volunteering my confidence increased, I met new people and, most importantly, gained new skills. I felt I had a purpose, whereas before I found it difficult to leave the house.

Completing the volunteering placement gave me the courage to apply for a job after being out of work for six years. I got a job at a Rehabilitation Centre for adults, where I encourage and help people with learning difficulties to become more independent. I have been working there for six months. I have also started an NVQ in Care to enhance my career prospects. It can be challenging and stressful but it gives me a great sense of satisfaction.

My progress is checked regularly to find out if I need support in any area. Recently, I went on a confidence-building course, as I still struggle with my confidence, especially when speaking in public. I would definitely recommend Volunteer Centres and the work they do.'

K Kaur *Volunteer*

Specialist brokerage: Redbridge CVS

Redbridge CVS created the Community Voice programme to give representatives from voluntary and community organisations in Redbridge a thorough understanding of how the statutory sector works and engages with local communities. The programme recruits and supports volunteers, known as Community Voice Graduates. They take part in consultations with the Local Authority, Police and local NHS. They build links with representatives from Redbridge Council and NHS Redbridge, who deliver training and information sessions.

The project ensures that community representatives understand their role and the reasons why statutory bodies seek local people's views. It gives community representatives the ability to consult, research local opinion and develop the skills and confidence to speak on behalf of their groups.

Volunteers really appreciate the practical exercises and dedicated follow-up, including planned visits to see council committees in action. Many comment on how useful the training is, in terms of relevance, clarifying jargon, understanding processes, networking, forming ongoing peer support structures and boosting confidence. Volunteers graduate from the course feeling equipped to get involved in planning and consultation processes.



Community Voice programme

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Case studies: promoting and marketing

Outreach surgeries: Volunteer Centre Havering

Volunteer Centre Havering holds surgeries at the Public Advice Service Centre in Romford. While waiting for their advice appointments, potential volunteers can find out how the Volunteer Centre can support them. This outreach service has increased awareness of volunteering, registered new volunteers and re-directed non-residents to their local Volunteer Centres.

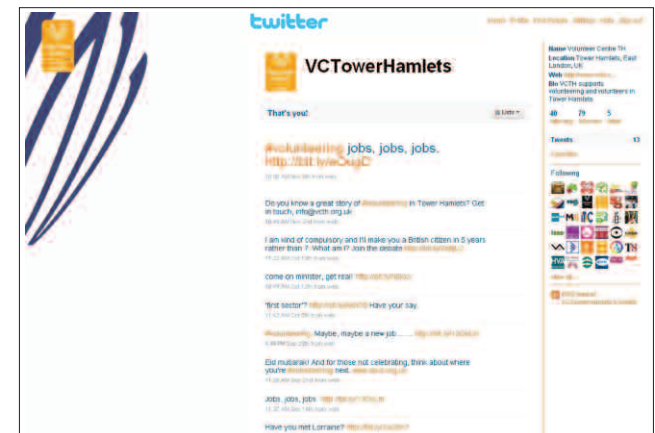
A young Nigerian student, completing a law conversion course, approached the Volunteer Centre at the advice centre while shopping in Romford. She was not a Havering resident but was keen to volunteer with the Citizens Advice Bureau, or a similar advice agency. Volunteer Centre Havering referred her to her local Volunteer Centre and within two days she had been contacted, reassured and connected to a suitable volunteering opportunity. She telephoned to thank Havering Volunteer Centre for helping her.

Do-it and Facebook: Volunteer Centre Tower Hamlets

Almost 40% of the prospective volunteers that approach Volunteer Centre Tower Hamlets are under 25 years of age. Social networking sites, such as Facebook and Twitter, are increasingly popular, particularly among young people. Recognising this, Volunteer Centre Tower Hamlets developed a presence on Facebook as a way of marketing volunteering and keeping in touch with their existing young volunteers.

The Facebook group enables Volunteer Centre Tower Hamlets to send e-mail alerts to all members about one-off volunteering opportunities, such as stewarding at cultural and sporting events. Facebook users can share their experiences of volunteering and interact with other volunteers. Through the Facebook group, the Volunteer Centre publishes case studies of people who are enjoying volunteering.

Volunteer Centre Tower Hamlets linked their Facebook group to the national volunteering website – www.do-it.org.uk. Through do-it, potential volunteers can search over 500 volunteering opportunities in Tower Hamlets, apply online and register to receive more information. People who can't attend face-to-face appointments can access all of the information they need about volunteering from the comfort of their home.



Promoting volunteering online

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Case studies: good practice development

Volunteer Managers' Forum: Volunteer Centre Greenwich

The Volunteer Managers' Forum in Greenwich meets quarterly and provides information about developments in volunteer management and networking opportunities. At each Forum, Volunteer Centre Greenwich provides feedback to member organisations about its services and how to access them.

The Forum invites guest speakers to promote additional services and introduce new support initiatives. Forum members choose a subject for the following meeting's master class – a recent example being a session on accepting volunteers from overseas.

The Forum also runs a group supervision session, during which Volunteer Managers raise issues for discussion and receive constructive support from their peers in a structured format. This is a positive way of sharing learning between organisations. The group supervision technique can also be transferred to participants' organisations for supporting and supervising their own volunteers.

London Volunteer Management Charter: Greater London Volunteering

Greater London Volunteering's Experts in Volunteering Team developed the London Volunteer Management Charter, in close consultation with the London Volunteer Centre Network. The project aims to improve the volunteering experience by strengthening volunteer management.

The Charter has ten strands of good practice: Equal Opportunities, Expenses, Induction, Organisational Involvement, Personal Development, Recruitment Process, Resolving Difficulties, Reward and Recognition, Safe Volunteering Environment and Support.

Bronwyn Powell from Lewisham's Children's Centre was the first person to sign the London Volunteer Management Charter in East London. By signing the Charter, Bronwyn committed her organisation to adopt good practice. She participated in a volunteer management health check, which will enable the Experts in Volunteering Development Worker for East London to put together an initial improvement plan. The project is being rolled out across London, and is free for organisations wanting to improve their volunteer management.



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Case studies: developing opportunities

Carol Straker Dance Foundation: Volunteer Centre Hackney

The Carol Straker Dance Foundation (CSDF) teaches people of all ages ballet, jazz and tap. Dancers can gain certificates and every student over five years old takes part in their annual show.

Initially CSDF ran very informally. However, Carol Straker wanted to introduce some structure and open their volunteering programme beyond the dance world. She attended training at Volunteer Centre Hackney and subsequently set up safeguarding procedures and complaints policies. Volunteer Centre Hackney then helped advertise their volunteer roles. Now volunteers help out in many different areas such as administration, preparing costumes and putting on the annual show.

Carol designs volunteer opportunities to suit individuals; a deaf dancer was given the chance to teach and under 16 year olds are encouraged to progress from being class members to volunteering, giving them the chance to prepare for teacher training. Volunteer Centre Hackney is also helping CSDF to recruit a Website Volunteer to maintain, update and redesign a website, so that parents and pupils can find out more about CSDF.

Volunteer Support Project: Bexley Volunteer Centre

Bexley Volunteer Centre runs a well-established volunteer support project. It helps people with mental health issues and learning disabilities who would not be able to access or sustain volunteering without extra support. The project initially accompanies volunteers to their placements and then supports them through visits and placement reviews for a further six months. The project is funded by the local Primary Care Trust and aims to assist 40–60 volunteers a year. Referrals are taken from local mental health teams, Rethink (Bexley) and Oxleas NHS Trust, and clients may also self-refer. Last year 120 enquiries to the project resulted in 68 active volunteers.

Volunteer support project also helps local organisations to develop new volunteering roles and adapt existing opportunities to accommodate the project’s volunteers and the skills they offer. The project awards Certificates of Inclusion to participating organisations, in recognition of their efforts to actively include volunteers with additional support needs. These organisations are particularly sensitive to the needs of their volunteers; they provide extra support (where required), regular supervision, and excellent induction programmes. They also offer a buddy who works alongside the new volunteer to make them feel more welcome.



Carol Straker
Dance Foundation

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Case studies: policy and campaigning

Childcare expenses: Volunteer Centre Hackney

Volunteer Centre Hackney is trying to influence local policy on reimbursing volunteers' childcare expenses. Research has discovered that a lack of reimbursed childcare expenses is a significant barrier to volunteering in the borough. This problem is exacerbated for single parents, who make up almost 11% of Hackney's population, and over half of whom live on welfare benefits. Although the government provides some free childcare for 3 and 4 year olds, this support is unavailable to parents of younger children. Unless they can find friends or family to look after their small children, volunteering remains unaffordable and therefore inaccessible to many parents.

Although many volunteer involving organisations reimburse volunteers' expenses for travel and meals, the majority don't reimburse the costs of childcare, as they simply do not have the funds. Increasingly, organisations appreciate that reimbursing volunteers' childcare expenses is a practical demonstration of their commitment to equality of opportunity and diversifying their volunteer-force.

Volunteer Centre Hackney encourages organisations to build volunteers' childcare expenses into budgets when applying for new funding and to include them in their own expenses policies. Hackney's Volunteering Strategy 2008–2013 identifies the cost of childcare as one of the major barriers to volunteering, but does not propose solutions. Volunteer Centre Hackney has encouraged local charities and community organisations to respond to the Strategy's consultation and try to remedy this problem, which affects a significant proportion of the community.

The Big Squeeze: Volunteer Centre Tower Hamlets

As part of their work to create a volunteer-friendly climate, all Volunteer Centres campaign on issues that affect volunteer involving organisations and volunteers. During 2009, Volunteer Centre Tower Hamlets joined forces with the London Voluntary Service Council on The Big Squeeze – a campaign that focused on the value of voluntary and community organisations during the economic recession.

As well as promoting the campaign to over 320 local volunteer involving organisations, Volunteer Centre Tower Hamlets facilitated a conference for groups in Tower Hamlets, held at Toynbee Hall. Participants were able to engage with speakers, including local funders, to discuss how the recession was creating more work for voluntary organisations and how to fund this work. A significant number of volunteer involving organisations in Tower Hamlets engaged with the campaign either online, or by attending the conference.

The campaign report highlights volunteering brokerage as a much-needed, yet under-funded service. It recognises that Volunteer Centres have a key role to play in helping Londoners gain experience that will lead them towards employment, whilst acknowledging that some East London Volunteer Centres were stretched well beyond current capacity. The Big Squeeze campaign report argues the case for additional investment in local volunteering infrastructure.



Volunteer Centre,
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Case studies: strategic development

Volunteering research: Volunteer Centre Tower Hamlets

Volunteer Centre Tower Hamlets was one of the first Volunteer Centres in England to undertake a major piece of local research into volunteering, commissioned by their Local Strategic Partnership. The Volunteer Centre worked on the research for over six months, in collaboration with the Institute for Volunteering Research and the local Council.

The research was designed to produce baseline information on local volunteering, to explore the scope and quality of volunteering in the borough and to examine motivations and barriers experienced by volunteers. It was the first time that volunteering activity and trends had been measured in Tower Hamlets. Research results indicated that 29% of adults in Tower Hamlets had participated in formal volunteering in the previous year. Based on the 2001 Census, this equated to nearly 44,000 individuals volunteering. More than half of the volunteers gave at least two hours of their time each week. ‘Regular’ volunteers averaged 13 hours of volunteering in the previous month – the equivalent to an annual contribution of almost £52 million to the local economy.

The research served as a valuable model for other local authorities. It enabled the Volunteer Centre to demonstrate the economic and social value of volunteering to decision-makers and funders and to highlight the challenges ahead in developing volunteering locally.

Volunteering strategy: Volunteer Centre Lewisham

Volunteer Centre Lewisham sits on a number of local strategic partnerships, including the Stronger Communities Partnership Board, and currently chairs the Compact and ChangeUp consortia.

The Community Strategy Steering Group commissioned Volunteer Centre Lewisham to lead on the development of a Lewisham Volunteering Strategy. The Volunteer Centre ensured that the strategy reflected the breadth of volunteer involving organisations and included groups hoping to work with volunteers in the future. Volunteer Centre Lewisham set up the Volunteering Strategy Steering Group, which comprised representatives from the voluntary sector, including Voluntary Action Lewisham (the local Council for Voluntary Service), groups representing refugees and disabled people, several directorates of Lewisham Council, University Hospital Lewisham, SLaM NHS Trust and the Metropolitan Police.

An extensive consultation about volunteering was carried out with residents and organisations in Lewisham. Volunteer Centre Lewisham used the results of the consultation to produce a detailed three-year strategy. The partners continue to meet to ensure delivery of the strategy, respond to national and local changes, hold joint events and apply together for funding.



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The facts

Involving everyone in volunteering

Volunteer Centres are open to all and aim to involve everyone in volunteering. Statistics from Volunteer Centres show an outstanding ability to engage with marginalised groups in our society.

Many Volunteer Centre clients have additional support needs. They often face discrimination due to disability, homelessness, mental health problems, addictions or a history of offending. Volunteering offers an opportunity for rehabilitation, enabling people to re-build their lives, move forward and make a positive contribution.

The current political and economic agenda focuses on helping more people into work. Volunteer Centres play a central role in helping people become more employable. Volunteering helps unemployed people to gain relevant skills, experience, confidence and references. As a result of the economic downturn, Volunteer Centres have recently worked with swelling numbers of people who have been made redundant, who are seeking a new career path, or who want to give something back to their community.

Volunteering projects address, amongst other things, the following four important areas:

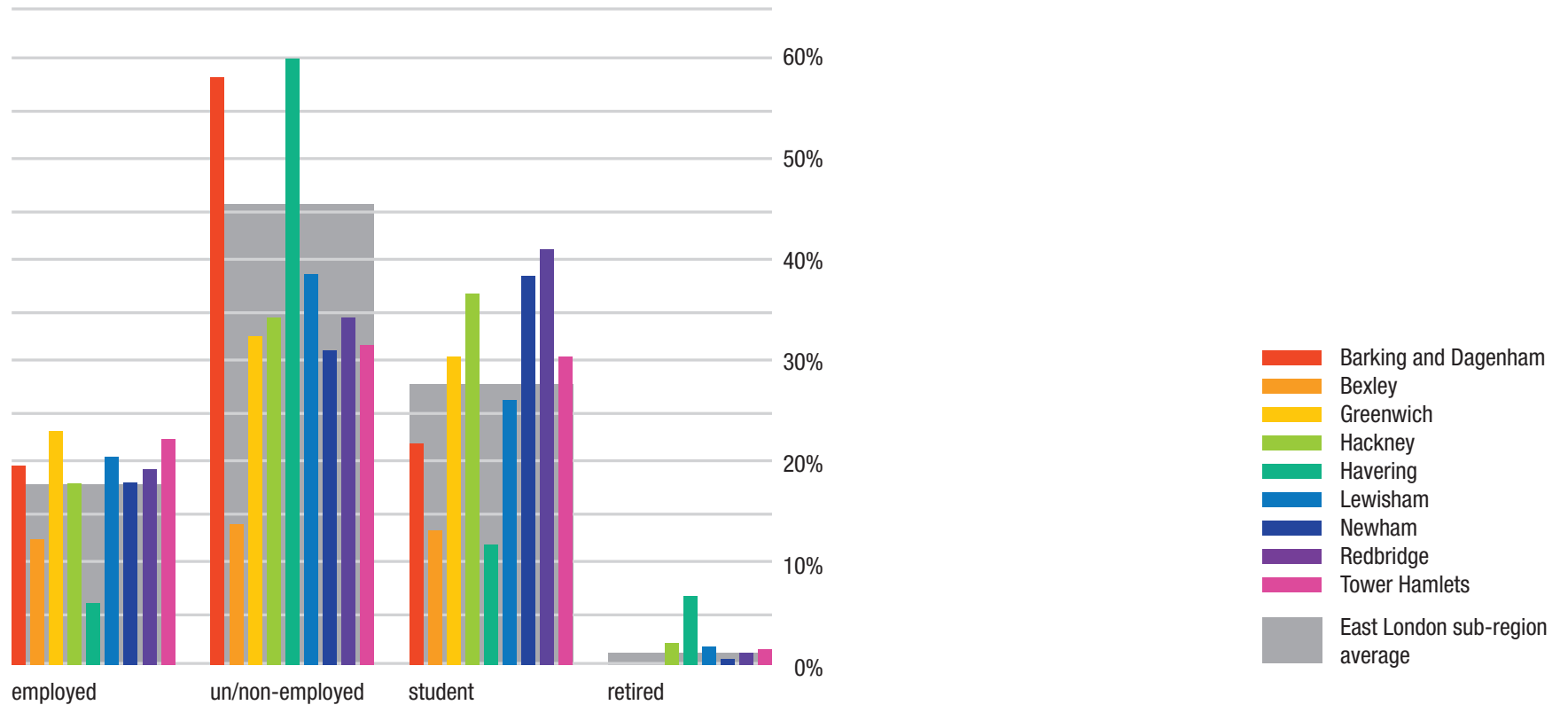
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The facts: employment

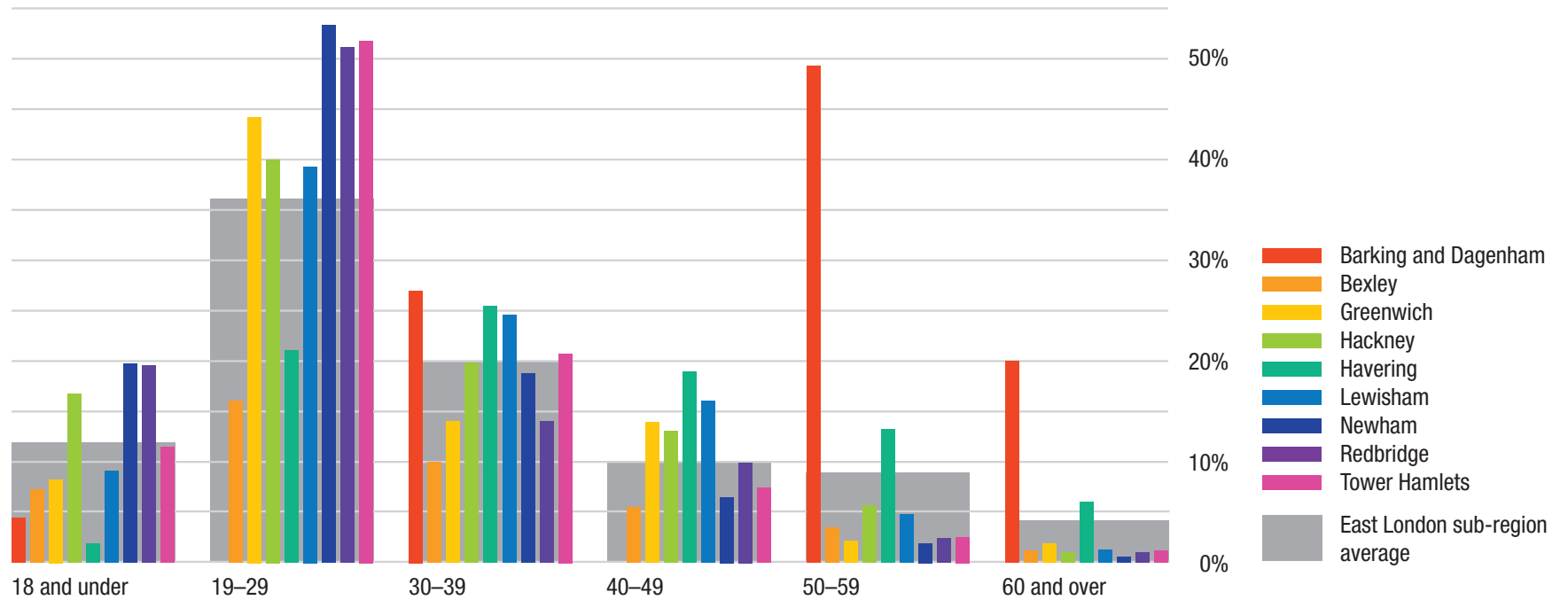
Volunteering is widely recognised as a stepping stone to paid work. Rising unemployment across East London has led to a significant increase in the number of unemployed people approaching Volunteer Centres, with some boroughs experiencing increases in the number of people seeking volunteering opportunities of up to 266%. In 2007–2008 before the onset of the recession regional figures show that 21% of clients were unemployed and seeking work.



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The facts: age

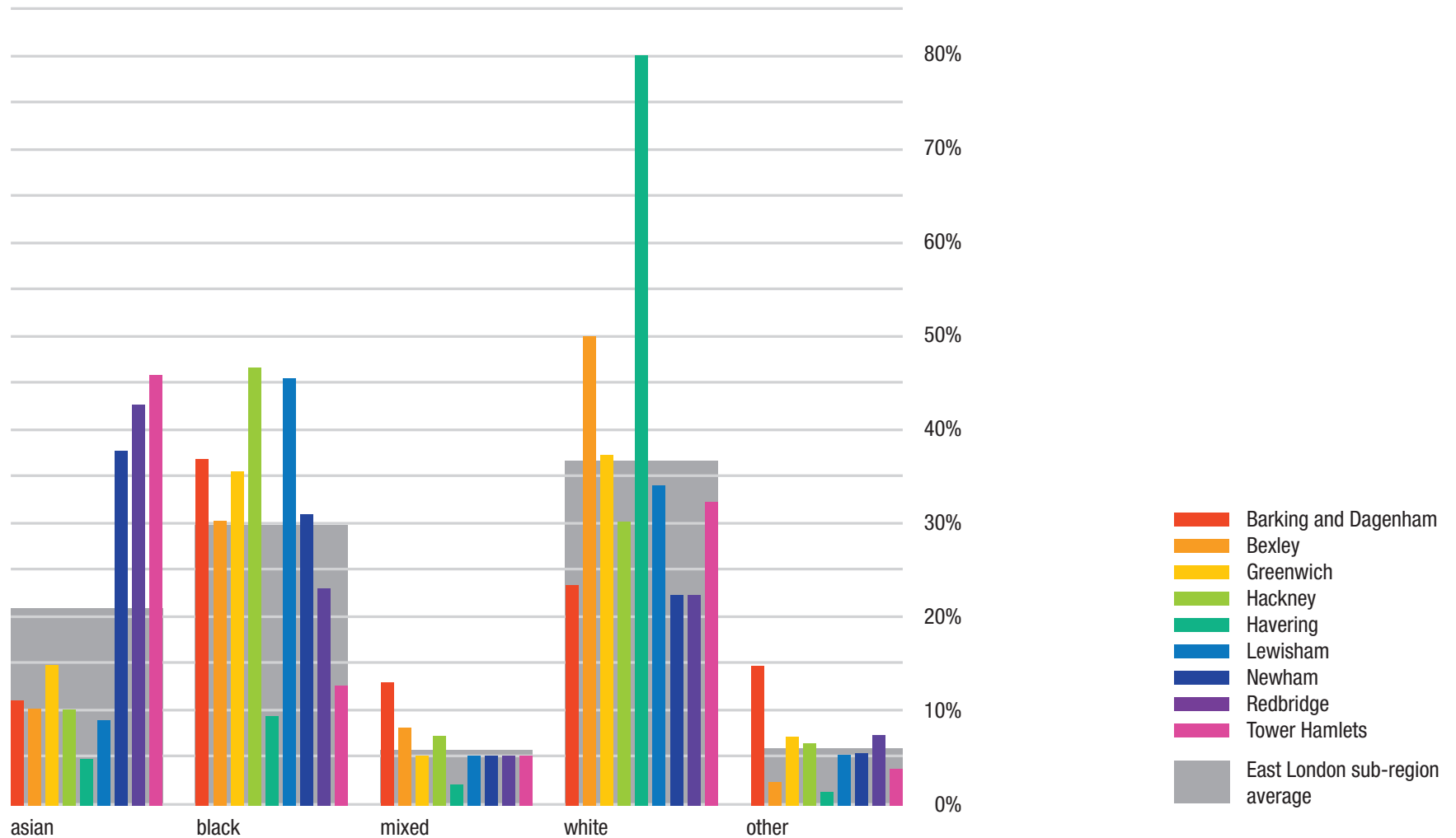
As qualifications alone will not secure employment, growing numbers of students and young people want to volunteer. 36% of Volunteer Centre service users were under twenty five in 2007–2008. But Volunteer Centres believe that nobody is ever too old to volunteer – 13% of their clients were over fifty.



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The facts: ethnicity

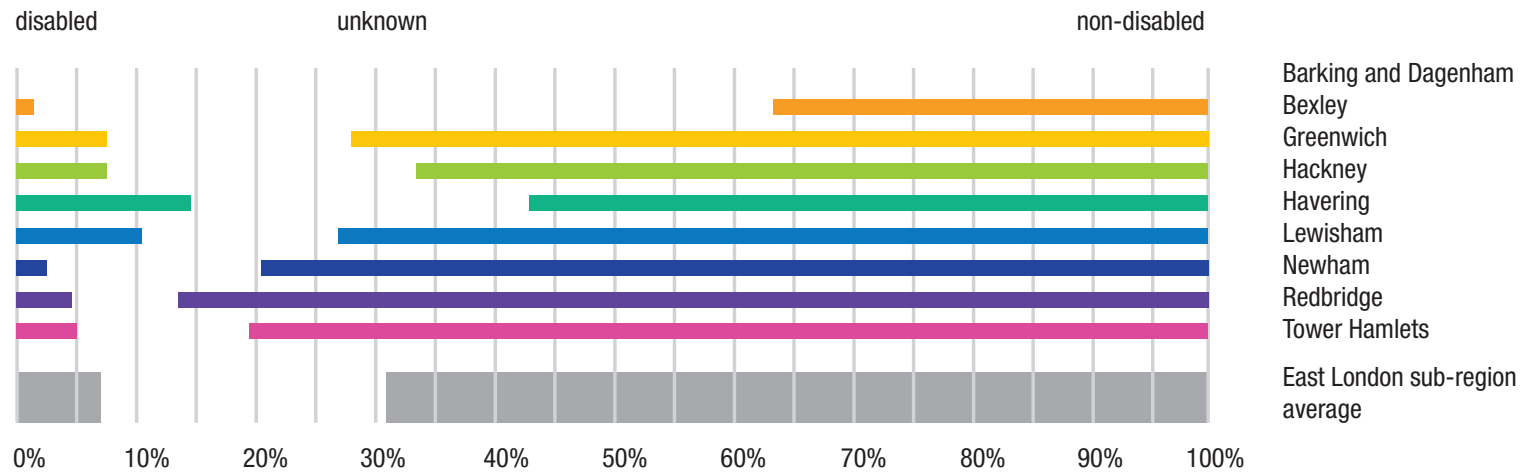
In 2007–2008, 63% of East London Volunteer Centres' clients were from a Black, Asian or Minority Ethnic community. Volunteer Centres work with new migrants as well as people from established minority communities. Many Volunteer Centre clients are keen to develop their language skills and to build relationships in the local community.



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The facts: disability

Although around 20% of people in the UK workforce have a disability of some kind, a recent survey found that only 6% of volunteers describe themselves as disabled. This figure may be changing soon, thanks to better access, changing attitudes and widespread information. Traditionally, disabled people have benefited from the support of volunteers but increasingly there are opportunities for them to get involved themselves and use their skills to help others.



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