



## **Coventry UK City of Culture 2021**

**How and to what extent has the City Host  
volunteering programme impacted on those  
taking part, particularly in terms of subjective  
wellbeing and civic pride?**

**Oyinlola Oyebode and Maxine Whelan**

**Supported by Iman Ghosh, Lauren Bell and Daniel Newport**

**September 2022**

**This focus study was commissioned by  
the Coventry City of Culture Trust**



## TABLE OF CONTENTS

1. Executive Summary.....	4
1.1 Background.....	4
1.2 This Focus Study.....	4
1.3 Research Approach And Methodology .....	4
1.4 Quantitative Findings .....	5
1.5 Qualitative Findings.....	5
1.5.1 Wellbeing Findings .....	5
1.5.2 Civic Pride .....	6
1.5.3 Other Findings .....	6
1.6 Conclusions.....	7
2. Introduction .....	8
2.1 Background.....	8
2.2 This Focus Study.....	9
2.3 Structure Of The Document .....	10
3. Researching How And To What Extent The Volunteering Programme Impacted On Those Taking Part .....	12
3.1 Activities Studied.....	12
3.2 Research Approach And Methodology .....	13
3.2.1 Quantitative Analysis.....	13
3.2.2 Qualitative Analysis .....	14
4. Research Findings .....	16
4.1 Quantitative Analysis .....	16
4.1.1 Characteristics Of Participants .....	16
4.1.2 City Host Wellbeing .....	17
4.1.3 City Host Civic Pride.....	18
4.2 Qualitative Analysis .....	19
4.2.1 Wellbeing Impacts .....	19
4.2.2 Mechanisms Of Change .....	19
4.2.3 Intermediate Outcomes .....	23
4.2.4 Key Influencing Factors.....	27



4.2.5	Civic Pride .....	31
4.2.6	Other.....	32
5.	Discussion And Conclusions .....	35
5.1	Volunteering Is Likely To Have Boosted Wellbeing For City Hosts .....	35
5.2	Volunteering May Have Increased City Host Civic Pride.....	36
5.3	Implications For City Of Culture 2021 Story Of Change .....	36
5.4	Implications For Policy And Practice .....	36
5.5	Conclusion .....	38
	Appendix 1: Glossary Of Terms.....	39
	Appendix 2: Bibliography .....	40

## **1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

### **1.1 BACKGROUND**

In December 2017, the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) awarded Coventry the title of UK City of Culture 2021 (UK CoC 2021). Built, awarded and delivered through an extensive partnership between public, private and civic, higher education, place-defined stakeholders and citizens, UK CoC 2021 ended in May 2022 (following a delayed start due to the COVID-19 pandemic).

Coventry City of Culture Trust, in partnership with Coventry University Student's Union and EnV recruited a team of volunteers to support UK CoC 2021. This team of volunteers were known as City Hosts. City Hosts were provided with free training, including mandatory training and additional optional courses that individuals could choose. They were given a recognisable Coventry 2021 uniform, that they were asked to wear while on shift. City Hosts were able to book shifts based on their interests and availability.

City Host shifts included being stationed at key transport hubs where they were asked to welcome and orient visitors. Other shifts involved roaming the city by foot to be a contact point for the public or being based at venues where City of Culture activities were scheduled, where City Hosts could provide information on artwork, installations and events. Some City Hosts undertook additional training and could then also choose to sign up to be the Team Leader for specific shifts, organising and supporting the team of City Hosts on that shift

### **1.2 THIS FOCUS STUDY**

The aim of this focus study was to understand how and to what extent the volunteering programme impacted on those taking part, particularly in terms of their subjective wellbeing and civic pride. Additionally, the study aimed to explore the mechanisms of change and intermediate outcomes between volunteering and subjective wellbeing.

### **1.3 RESEARCH APPROACH AND METHODOLOGY**

This project used a mixed-methods approach. This included a secondary analysis of data collected from City Hosts in a series of surveys by the Monitoring and Evaluation team conducted in August and November 2021, and April 2022, comprising both quantitative and qualitative (open text responses) data. The Short Warwick Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale (SWEMWBS) was used to measure wellbeing in the survey. Data from the Coventry Household Survey, collected January–March 2021 were used for comparison. This was complimented with analysis of qualitative data collected through semi-structured interviews, conducted by the research team.

## 1.4 QUANTITATIVE FINDINGS

Overall, 182 City Hosts took part in the survey in August 2021, 263 in November 2021 and 251 in April 2022. This represents less than twenty per cent of the people actively volunteering as City Hosts. The number included in our analyses is lower due to non-completion of some questions by some participants.

City Hosts assessed at all three time points had significantly higher SWEMWBS scores than the Coventry Household Survey participants, including those who reported volunteering, as well as those who did not volunteer ( $p < 0.001$  for all pairwise comparisons between City Hosts and Coventry Household Survey participants). There were no significant differences in SWEMWBS scores between City Hosts at the three time points of the survey.

In linear regression models adjusting for age, gender and limiting longstanding illness or disability, the City Hosts had significantly higher SWEMWBS scores than the Coventry Household Survey participants ( $p < 0.001$  for City Hosts at each wave compared with Coventry Household Survey participants who did not volunteer).

City Hosts and Coventry Household Survey participants who volunteered had significantly greater local area satisfaction than Coventry Household Survey participants who did not volunteer ( $p < 0.001$ ).

## 1.5 QUALITATIVE FINDINGS

A total of 27 City Hosts took part in interviews between December 2021 and May 2022. In addition, free text survey responses were analysed from each of the three City Host surveys in August 2021, November 2021 and April 2022.

### 1.5.1 WELLBEING FINDINGS

*'Made me more positive. Uh, done brilliant for my mental health.'* (P007)

Interview testimony, as well as survey responses, suggested positive wellbeing impacts from volunteering and supported theorised pathways to improved wellbeing.

Theoretical 'mechanisms of change', the ways in which wellbeing might be impacted by volunteering, were supported by the qualitative data. These were (i) connecting with others, (ii) feeling appreciated, (iii) doing something purposeful and meaningful, (iv) developing and using skills and experiences, (v) role and group identity, (vi) enjoyment, (vii) structure, routine and distraction, (viii) exposure to outdoors and nature, (ix) role demands and (x) exposure to culture.

In addition, most City Hosts reported one or more 'intermediate outcomes', ways that volunteering impacted them on the pathway to improved wellbeing: either (i) a contribution to their purpose, identity, and the meaning of their life, (ii) better relationships or (iii) personal growth and development as a consequence of taking part in the volunteering programme.

The most frequent mechanism of change discussed was ‘connecting with others’. This included making connections with other City Hosts, as acquaintances, as well as deeper friendships and even romantic relationships. It also included connecting with the general public through the role. It was also clear from the data that City Hosts had a very strong identity, and that this identity had a key role in making them feel united, often referred to as a ‘family’. The only mechanism of change which had mixed positive and negative testimony coded to it was ‘role demands’. While volunteers liked the flexibility that the City Host programme offered, there was also disappointment when they felt they had attended events where they were not needed. City Hosts reported that the opportunity to take part in the city’s cultural events played a part in them accruing benefits from the volunteering programme.

City Hosts reported several barriers and facilitators to gaining the benefits of volunteering. These included individual circumstances, mainly to do with employment, commitments to family, and medical problems. However, a strength of the City Host programme was the flexibility for City Hosts to choose exactly what they committed to, and allowing them the chance to volunteer even when they had other commitments. COVID-19 was mentioned by every interviewee. For many, volunteering was a way of re-entering society after the lockdown and restrictions, often facilitating re-engagement and re-connection with other people. City Hosts also talked about precautions that allowed them to be able to volunteer despite concerns around COVID-19 (e.g. mask wearing and outdoor shifts).

### **1.5.2 CIVIC PRIDE**

*‘I feel I belong to Coventry, or Coventry belongs to me, I’m not sure which.’ (P020)*

As well as wellbeing impacts, City Hosts unanimously reported that their role had allowed them to maintain or improve their relationship with Coventry. This included many with a longstanding love of Coventry, and those re-discovering Coventry or getting to know Coventry for the first time.

### **1.5.3 OTHER FINDINGS**

City Hosts reported physical health benefits from volunteering relating to physical activity, sunshine, and provoking health goals. The study provides evidence that volunteering as a City Host allowed individuals to engage with the UK CoC 2021 events, including events they would not otherwise have considered. Many City Hosts are actively seeking further opportunities to volunteer, sometimes as part of a lifelong pattern of volunteering but also having been introduced to volunteering for the first-time during UK CoC 2021.

## 1.6 CONCLUSIONS

*It's a good way to meet people. It's a good way to show your passion for the city and and it's a good way to... keep yourself fit. And generally very good for your mental health. (P001)*

Quantitative data suggests that City Hosts had measurably higher mental wellbeing than the general population of Coventry, including the subset of Coventry residents who take part in other volunteering. Due to various methodological limitations this is difficult to interpret on its own, but taken alongside the qualitative data, it does seem likely that City Hosts had better wellbeing than the general population of Coventry, and it also seems likely that it was taking part in the City Host programme that was at least partly responsible for their better wellbeing.

There was an association between volunteering and civic pride in the quantitative analysis. Qualitative data suggested that many City Hosts had pre-existing high levels of civic pride, or positive feelings towards Coventry, but that this may have been strengthened through the City Host volunteering.

Strengths of the City Host programme, that likely helped to drive wellbeing benefits, and therefore recommendations for other volunteering programmes, include:

1. Paying attention to all the mechanisms of change that mediate improved wellbeing for volunteers, particularly:
  - a. including opportunities for volunteers to make social connections
  - b. developing a strong role and group identity
2. Flexibility around what volunteers do, how much, and how often.

Weaknesses of the City Host programme, for other volunteering programmes to avoid include:

1. Instances of a lack of activities or responsibilities for volunteers
2. Some perceived unfairness of shift distribution.

In conclusion, our study suggests that the City Host programme increased City Host wellbeing and that this was achieved through many mechanisms, particularly through increasing social connectedness and sense of belonging. Strengths of the City Host programme have been identified that other volunteer programmes could emulate to promote positive outcomes for their volunteers.

## 2. INTRODUCTION

### 2.1 BACKGROUND

In December 2017, the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) awarded Coventry the title of UK City of Culture 2021 (UK CoC 2021). UK City of Culture is a designation given to a city (or local area) in the United Kingdom for a period of one calendar year, during which the successful bidder hosts a range of cultural activities. The designation is awarded every four years through a competitive process. The vision for UK CoC 2021 stated:

*We will reimagine the role of culture in a diverse, modern Britain, demonstrating that culture is a force that changes lives, moving Coventry and the region forward.*

Built, awarded and delivered through an extensive partnership between public, private and civic, higher education, place-defined stakeholders and citizens, UK CoC 2021 ended in May 2022 (following a delayed start due to the COVID-19 pandemic).

In seeking to meet its vision, UK CoC 2021 publicly set out the four impacts within its Theory/Story of Change<sup>1</sup> by which its success and legacy would be assessed<sup>2</sup>. These impacts set out how place-based cultural investment driven by the year was expected to support and deliver city-based democracy, social prosperity and well-being, environmentalism, economic development and innovation, and place-based globalism.

To support assessment of and learning from UK CoC 2021, the Monitoring and Evaluation team put in place a Performance Measurement and Evaluation Strategy<sup>3</sup>. This has framed a substantial range of research, evaluation and data collection to investigate and evaluate the research hypotheses, impacts and learning that has materialised through UK CoC 2021.

As part of this programme of research activity, a series of focus studies were commissioned by the Coventry City of Culture Trust and awarded through competitive tender across Coventry University and the University of Warwick.

---

<sup>1</sup> <https://coventry21evaluation.info/evaluation/> (accessed 1 August 2022)

<sup>2</sup> Neelands Jonathan, Henry Nick, De Souza Valerie, Beer Haley, Evans Samantha, Anzel Andrew, Healey Tim, Chun Lam Si, Scott Mark. *Coventry City of Culture 2021 Performance Measurement and Evaluation Strategy 2019 – 2024 V2*. Coventry: 2020. p. 9.

URL: [https://coventry21evaluation.info/wp-content/uploads/2022/06/city-of-culture\\_pme-strategy\\_jan20.pdf](https://coventry21evaluation.info/wp-content/uploads/2022/06/city-of-culture_pme-strategy_jan20.pdf) (accessed 1 August 2022)

<sup>3</sup> Neelands et al *Performance Measurement and Evaluation Strategy*



## 2.2 THIS FOCUS STUDY

This focus study was commissioned to contribute towards the evidence for specific outcomes detailed within the UK CoC 2021 Story of Change. These are:

- Increase in civic pride
- Community-led production and programming increases cultural participation and activism
- Cultural sector activity makes a significant contribution to the economic, environmental, social and health and wellbeing targets for the city and the region.

The aim of this focus study was to understand how and to what extent the City Hosts volunteering programme impacted on those taking part, particularly in terms of their subjective wellbeing and civic pride. Additionally, the study aimed to explore the mechanisms of change and intermediate outcomes between volunteering and subjective wellbeing. This was done using a theory of change developed by What Works Wellbeing and presented below [Figure 1]. This will be referred to as the WWWToc throughout the report.

The concept of wellbeing has been debated for thousands of years. What Works Wellbeing describes wellbeing as ‘how we’re doing’ as individuals, communities and as a nation<sup>4</sup>. When the concept of wellbeing is applied to individuals, it often includes the individual’s feelings relating to their satisfaction with life, as well as positive and negative emotions. In addition, the concept of wellbeing can include aspects of how an individual is functioning; for example, relating to being able to think clearly and have good relationships with others. This focus on feeling and functioning makes the concept of wellbeing similar to the concept of mental wellbeing. In this focus study the Short Warwick Edinburgh Mental Well-being Scale (SWEMWBS) will be used to measure wellbeing. SWEMWBS was developed, and has been validated, to enable the monitoring of mental wellbeing in the general population, and to evaluate projects, programmes and policies which aim to improve mental wellbeing<sup>5</sup>.

Wellbeing and mental wellbeing are both drivers of, and consequences of, population health, as well as social and economic progress (Maccagnan et al, 2018). There is clear evidence that volunteering can be good for volunteers’ wellbeing, and that those with higher levels of wellbeing are more likely to get involved in volunteering (Stuart et al, 2020). The WWWToc underpins this focus study [Figure 1]. The WWWToc was created after an extensive review of the literature. It is a visual representation of the relationship between volunteering and wellbeing, including the ‘mechanisms of action’ and ‘intermediate outcomes’ which are the steps between the volunteering ‘activity’ and the final ‘subjective wellbeing impacts’.

---

<sup>4</sup> <https://whatworkswellbeing.org/about-wellbeing/what-is-wellbeing/> (accessed 10 August 2022)

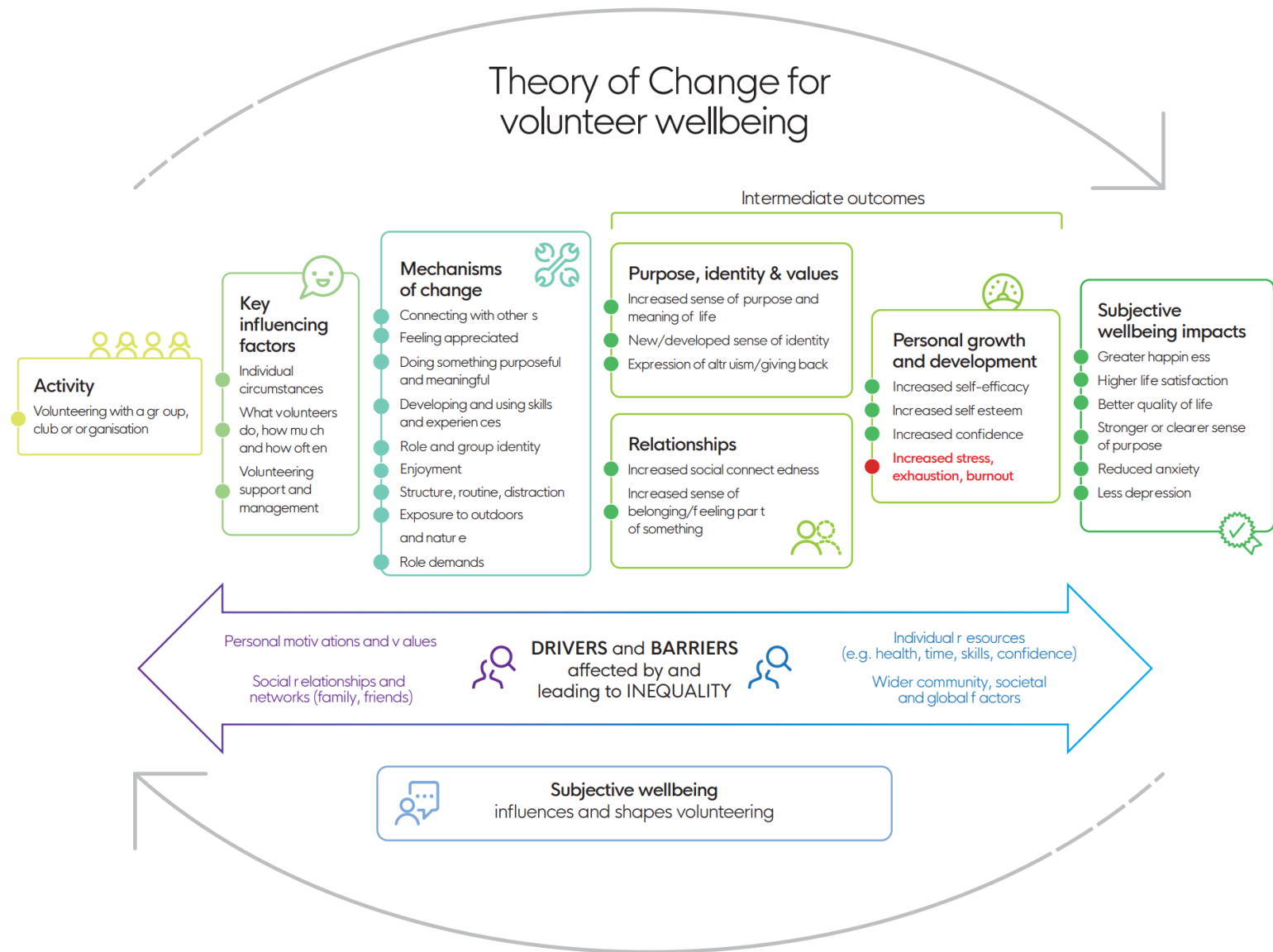
<sup>5</sup> <https://warwick.ac.uk/fac/sci/med/research/platform/wemwbs/about/> (accessed 10 August 2022)

The WWWToc also includes the list of key influencing factors, drivers and barriers which interact with the pathways between the volunteering activity and the wellbeing outcomes. The WWWToc was used to inform the design of this focus study and to aid qualitative data analysis.

As with wellbeing, civic pride is also a debated concept. Civic pride is related to social cohesion and social capital, it describes shared positive beliefs about a place. A recent review identified several studies linking mega-events (such as UK CoC 2021) to residents' civic pride and suggested that volunteering could have a positive influence on this association (Mair et al, 2020).

### **2.3 STRUCTURE OF THE DOCUMENT**

Following this introductory section, which has provided background context, Section 3 details the research methodology used. Section 4 then presents the results of our focus study, looking firstly at quantitative, and then qualitative findings for the key outcomes of wellbeing and civic pride. Finally, Section 5 discusses and synthesises the findings and presents some implications of these.



**Figure 1: What Works Wellbeing Theory of Change for volunteer wellbeing.** From Stuart, J., Kamerāde, D., Connolly, S., Ellis Paine, A., Nichols, G. and Grotz, J. (2020) *The Impacts of Volunteering on the Subjective Wellbeing of Volunteers: A Rapid Evidence Assessment*, What Works Centre for Wellbeing and Spirit of 2012 [online] What Works Centre for Wellbeing. Available at: [https://whatworkswellbeing.org/wp-content/uploads/1920/10/volunteer-wellbeing-Oct-20\\_briefing.pdf](https://whatworkswellbeing.org/wp-content/uploads/1920/10/volunteer-wellbeing-Oct-20_briefing.pdf)

### 3. RESEARCHING HOW AND TO WHAT EXTENT THE VOLUNTEERING PROGRAMME IMPACTED ON THOSE TAKING PART

#### 3.1 ACTIVITIES STUDIED

Coventry City of Culture Trust, in partnership with Coventry University Student's Union and EnV<sup>6</sup> recruited a team of volunteers to support UK CoC 2021. This team of volunteers were known as City Hosts. As of 30 June 2022, when the programme stopped recruiting new volunteers, there were 4185 people who had expressed their interest to become a City Host (signed up) and 1515 were fully trained and deployed as City Hosts.

City Hosts were provided with free training, including mandatory training and additional optional courses that individuals could choose. They were given a recognisable Coventry 2021 uniform, that they were asked to wear while on shift. They were also able to book shifts based on their interests and availability.



**Figure 2**

Photograph posted on, and used with the permission of, the City Hosts' Facebook group

City Host shifts included being stationed at key transport hubs where they were asked to welcome and orient visitors. Other shifts involved roaming the city by foot to be a contact point for the public or being based at venues where City of Culture activities were scheduled, where City Hosts could provide information on artwork, installations and events.

---

<sup>6</sup> <https://env.uk.com/>

Some City Hosts undertook additional training and could then also choose to sign up to be the Team Leader for specific shifts, organising and supporting the team of City Hosts on that shift.

### 3.2 RESEARCH APPROACH AND METHODOLOGY

This project was completed by a research team based at University of Warwick and Coventry University. The team was led by Dr Oyinlola Oyeboode, associate professor in public health at Warwick Medical School<sup>7</sup> and honorary consultant in public health at the Office for Health Improvement and Disparities. Dr Oyeboode worked in partnership with Dr Maxine Whelan, an assistant professor at the research centre for intelligent healthcare<sup>8</sup>. Iman Ghosh, a research assistant at Warwick Medical School, Dr Daniel Newport, a clinical academic on placement at Warwick Medical School and Lauren Bell, a research assistant at Coventry University supported the focus study. The team used a mixed-methods approach to answer the research question posed, informed by a recent review of relevant evidence (Stuart et al, 2020). This included a secondary analysis of data collected from City Hosts in a series of surveys by the Monitoring and Evaluation team, comprising both quantitative and qualitative (open text responses) data. This was complimented with qualitative data collected by the research team through semi-structured interviews with City Hosts.

#### 3.2.1 QUANTITATIVE ANALYSIS

The Monitoring and Evaluation team sent a link to an online survey to all active City Hosts in August 2021, November 2021 and April 2022. At the request of the focus study team, the survey included questions relating to outcomes of interest which included wellbeing and civic pride:

- Wellbeing was measured using the short-form Warwick Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale (SWEMWBS) (Ng Fat et al, 2017), a seven-item scale that captures feeling and functioning aspects of mental wellbeing, which has been shown to have high validity and reliability in psychometric analyses and is sensitive to change. Further justification for using SWEMWBS is its inclusion within the Coventry Household Survey – providing a comparator to the City Host population.
- Civic pride was measured using a question that also features in the Coventry Household Survey: ‘Generally how satisfied are you with your local area as a place to live?’

The survey further included sociodemographic questions, including many matched to those asked in the Coventry Household Survey.

---

<sup>7</sup> <https://warwick.ac.uk/fac/sci/med/research/hscience> (accessed 10 August 2022)

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.coventry.ac.uk/research/areas-of-research/centre-for-intelligent-healthcare/> (accessed 10 August 2022)

The Coventry Household Survey data were used as a baseline or comparator for our analyses. For context, the Coventry Household Survey is run by Coventry City Council every 2 to 3 years. Invitations to complete the survey online for 2021 were sent by post to 20,200 households selected randomly across the city, stratified by Middle Layer Super Output Areas (a geographical area) and Indices of Multiple Deprivation to ensure representation across geography and deprivation levels. Each letter invited the member of the household with the next birthday, aged 16 or over, to participate. Surveys were completed between 19th February 2021 and 21st March 2021 and 4162 responses were received in total. It is worth noting that the entire period of data collection fell within a national lockdown, put in place to restrict the spread of COVID-19 in the United Kingdom. From 5th January to 8th March schools and all non-essential retail, hospitality and personal care services were closed and people were only allowed to leave their homes for a few specific reasons.

From 8th March until 29th March 2021, the restrictions continued, except that schools re-opened, people were able to meet up with a friend outside and care home visits resumed. In contrast, the City Host surveys were completed during periods of no legal restrictions.

The Coventry Household Survey asked a question relating to volunteering status: 'Have you volunteered in your local community before and/or during the COVID-19 outbreak?'. Those who responded 'Yes, I volunteer with an organisation' either 'before' or 'during' the COVID-19 outbreak were grouped with those who said 'yes, I volunteer informally (such as by helping neighbours)' as a group of Coventry Household Survey participants who volunteer. All others were classified as non-volunteering.

Data obtained were summarised using descriptive statistics. Comparisons of means SWEMWBS scores between the City Host group at each wave and the Coventry Household Survey were made using analysis of variance (ANOVA)<sup>9</sup>. Testing for differences in civic pride between the City Host group at each wave and the Coventry Household Survey (dichotomised as (i) those reporting that they were satisfied or very satisfied with their local area as a place to live, vs (ii) those who were neither satisfied nor dissatisfied, those who were fairly dissatisfied and those who were very dissatisfied) was done using a chi<sup>2</sup> test<sup>10</sup>. Finally, linear regression was used to examine the independent association between volunteering status and SWEMWBS adjusting for key confounders.

### **3.2.2 QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS**

An objective of this study was to collect data from 20 to 40 participants to explore their experiences and perspectives of the City Host role. City Hosts were invited to participate through the Monitoring and Evaluation survey, through further communications which came from their management team (EnV) and also requests posted on the private City Host Facebook group, including videos of the research team advertising the interviews.

---

<sup>9</sup> Analysis of variance (ANOVA) is used to test whether the mean of a continuous variable differs between two or more groups.

<sup>10</sup> A chi<sup>2</sup> test compared the distribution of a categorical variable across different groups.

Interested City Hosts approached the research team by email or telephone and, in return, received participant information and consent forms, and a mutually convenient time for the interview was identified. Interviews could take place at any time to fit in with participants' lives. All participants gave signed informed consent before taking part in the study.

The interview guide was developed by the research team, and trialled with early participants before being used with the remaining participants. Interviews were conducted by telephone, face-to-face or via Microsoft Teams. British Sign Language support, via the University of Warwick, was made available (as needed). Participants were allowed joint interviews (i.e. two City Hosts and the interviewer) if they preferred this format.

The research team reflected on the data as they were collected, identifying that thematic saturation was being reached by the time 15 participants had been recruited (i.e.: no new concepts or ideas were arising), however noting that some groups were under-represented in the participant pool.

In response, targeted invitations were sent to City Hosts who were either aged <35 or had less experience of City Hosting to encourage participation by under-represented groups. Additional interviews with these less well represented groups did identify further themes, but again saturation was reached before the study closed.

All participants provided signed informed consent before data collection, and the study was reviewed and gained ethical approval from the University of Warwick Biomedical Sciences Research Ethics Committee (full ethical approval: BSREC 07/21-22).

Interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim. They were analysed deductively using the WWWToc [Figure 1] as a starting point, and also inductively – in order to capture additional themes of interest present in the data that were not within the WWWToc. Analysis of the interview data was facilitated by NVivo (March 2020 release).

The Monitoring and Evaluation survey also captured brief qualitative data via an open text box which asked City Hosts to 'please give us your thoughts about volunteering for City of Culture and the City Host programme so far?'. Answers to this question were imported into Microsoft Excel and coded using the framework developed from deductive and inductive coding of the interview data.

Some themes were amalgamated where they comprised similar concepts and quotes during the process of preparing the report.

## 4. RESEARCH FINDINGS

### 4.1 QUANTITATIVE ANALYSIS

Overall, 182 City Hosts took part in the survey in August 2021, 263 in November 2021 and 251 in April 2022. However, the number included in our analyses is lower due to non-completion of some questions by some participants.

#### 4.1.1 CHARACTERISTICS OF PARTICIPANTS

The demographics of City Hosts completing the surveys were broadly similar to the Coventry Household Survey population. Most participants in both groups were from the 45 to 74 age-groups, there were more women than men, a majority were White British with other sizable minority populations identifying as Asian or Asian British or White Other ethnicity, and most are living without a life limiting health problem or disability [Table 1].

**Table 1: Characteristics of survey participants, presented as N (%)**

	City Host survey participants: August 2021	City Host survey participants: November 2021	City Host survey participants: April 2022	Coventry Household Survey (2021) volunteers	Coventry Household Survey (2021) Non-volunteers
Total	158	196	198	956	2910
<b>Age</b>					
16-24	7 (4.4)	8 (4.1)	5 (2.5)	25 (2.6)	80 (2.8)
25-34	10 (6.3)	13 (6.6)	13 (6.6)	56 (5.9)	287 (9.9)
35-44	17 (24.1)	16 (8.2)	21 (10.6)	123 (12.9)	429 (14.7)
45-54	38 (23.7)	39 (19.9)	38 (19.2)	185 (19.4)	484 (16.6)
55-64	44 (27.9)	61 (31.1)	68 (34.3)	207 (21.7)	614 (21.1)
65-74	33 (20.9)	39 (19.9)	41 (20.7)	211 (22.1)	532 (18.3)
75+	7 (4.4)	7 (3.6)	8 (4.0)	139 (14.5)	452 (15.5)
Missing	2 (1.3)	13 (6.6)	4 (2.0)	10 (1.1)	32 (1.1)
<b>Gender</b>					
Men	55 (34.8)	60 (30.6)	60 (30.3)	416 (43.5)	1309 (45.0)
Women	101 (63.9)	126 (64.3)	128 (64.7)	529 (55.3)	1562 (53.7)
Other (Non-binary, prefer not to say, transgender, missing)	2 (1.3)	10 (5.1)	10 (5.1)	11 (1.15)	39 (1.34)



	City Host survey participants: August 2021	City Host survey participants: November 2021	City Host survey participants: April 2022	Coventry Household Survey (2021) volunteers	Coventry Household Survey (2021) Non-volunteers
<b>Ethnic group</b>					
Asian or Asian British	20 (12.7)	22 (11.2)	18 (9.1)	86 (9.0)	259 (8.9)
Black or Black British	7 (4.4)	5 (2.6)	7 (3.5)	21 (2.2)	93 (3.2)
Mixed or multiple groups	0 (0)	3 (1.5)	3 (1.5)	23 (2.4)	55 (1.9)
White British	114 (72.2)	141 (71.9)	144 (72.7)	729 (76.3)	2139 (73.5)
White Other	14 (8.9)	11 (5.6)	13 (6.6)	66 (6.9)	258 (8.92)
Other/ Prefer not to say/ Missing	3 (1.9)	14 (7.1)	13 (6.6)	31 (3.2)	106 (3.6)
<b>Are your day-to-day activities limited because of a health problem or disability which has lasted, or is expected to last, at least 12 months?</b>					
Yes, limited a lot or limited a little	28 (17.7)	42 (21.4)	50 (25.5)	322 (33.7)	1119 (38.5)
Not at all	129 (81.7)	146 (74.5)	144 (72.7)	633 (66.1)	1788 (61.4)
Missing	1 (0.6)	8 (4.1)	4 (2.0)	1 (0.1)	3 (0.1)

Note: due to rounding not all percentages will add up to 100.

#### 4.1.2 CITY HOST WELLBEING

City Hosts assessed at each of the three time points had significantly higher SWEMWBS scores than the Coventry Household Survey participants, including those who report volunteering, as well as those who do not volunteer ( $p < 0.001$  for all pairwise comparisons between City Hosts and Coventry Household Survey participants;  $p < 0.001$  for the pairwise comparison between Coventry Household Survey participants who volunteer and those who do not volunteer). There was no significant difference in SWEMWBS scores between City Hosts at the three time points of the survey ( $p = 0.485-0.996$  for pairwise comparisons between City Host groups). This suggests that mental wellbeing remained at a constant level among the City Host population who responded to the survey throughout UK CoC 2021 [Table 2].

**Table 2: SWEMWBS scores, presented as mean (standard deviation) by volunteering status**

Who?	SWEMWBS score, mean (s.d.)
City Hosts, August 2021	24.1 (4.0)
City Hosts, November 2021	24.6 (4.1)
City Hosts, April 2022	24.8 (4.1)
Coventry Household Survey participants who volunteer	22.1 (3.9)
Coventry Household Survey participants who do not volunteer	21.3 (4.0)

In a linear regression model adjusting for age, gender and limiting longstanding illness or disability, the City Hosts had significantly higher SWEMWBS scores than the Coventry Household Survey participants who did not volunteer (all  $p < 0.001$ ). Coventry Household Survey participants who volunteered also had significantly higher SWEMWBS scores than those who did not volunteer ( $p < 0.001$ ) [Table 3].

**Table 3: Multivariable analysis examining independent association between volunteering status and SWEMWBS score. Coventry Household Survey non-volunteers as reference category**

Volunteering status	$\beta$ -coefficient	T	significance
Coventry Household Survey volunteers	0.73	5.02	<0.001
City Hosts August 2021	2.61	8.16	<0.001
City Hosts November 2021	3.32	11.34	<0.001
City Hosts April 2022	3.44	11.91	<0.001

#### 4.1.3 CITY HOST CIVIC PRIDE

A similar percentage of City Hosts and Coventry Household Survey participants who volunteered reported that they were satisfied or very satisfied with their local area as a place to live, this was ten percentage points higher than Coventry Household Survey participants who did not volunteer [Table 4]. This difference was statistically significant ( $p < 0.001$ ).

**Table 4: Civic pride by volunteering status**

Volunteering status	Number (percentage) satisfied or very satisfied with their local area as a place to live
City Hosts, August 2021	129 (81.7)
City Hosts, November 2021	155 (82.0)
City Hosts, April 2022	155 (80.3)
Coventry Household Survey participants who volunteer	758 (79.3)
Coventry Household Survey participants who do not volunteer	2032 (70.2)

## 4.2 QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS

Overall, 27 City Hosts took part in interviews between December 2021 and May 2022. In addition, approximately 180 free text survey responses were analysed from each of the three City Host surveys in August 2021, November 2021 and April 2022. Below we present our findings, firstly in terms of the perceived impacts on wellbeing identified by participants, followed by the findings relating to pathways to improved wellbeing that are theorised in the WWWToc [Figure 1].

### 4.2.1 WELLBEING IMPACTS

During their interviews, City Hosts spoke of positive wellbeing impacts of volunteering, which was also reflected in survey responses. These mapped to some of the terms used in the WWWToc. City Hosts talked about feeling greater happiness 'Having those experiences has definitely made me feel sort of happier' (P003), 'I smile every time I talk about doing the hosting' (P009); satisfaction 'it's quite fulfilling' (P008); and better quality of life 'I spend my whole life a lot better, I'm not frustrated and angry all the time' (P007). Reduced anxiety and less depression were also mentioned by City Hosts although mainly indirectly 'The confidence building... wouldn't say it's stopped me from overthinking things because I still do that, but just yeah, I guess I, I panic less' (P032), and a survey participant recalled 'It's great for one's mental well being'.

Although wellbeing impacts were discussed, generally these were in the context of how and why volunteering had given rise to these impacts, detailed below.

### 4.2.2 MECHANISMS OF CHANGE

All the mechanisms of change outlined in the WWWToc were supported by the interviews and survey responses [Table 5]. Almost all of these mechanisms were primarily discussed as ways in which positive changes in volunteer wellbeing had been brought about, with the exception of 'role demands'. The most frequent mechanism of change discussed was 'connecting with others'. This included making connections with other City Hosts, as acquaintances, as well as deeper friendships and even romantic relationships. It also included connecting with the general public through the role. It was also clear from the data that City Hosts had a very clear identity, that was linked to the uniform. This identity had a key role in making them feel united, often referred to as a 'family', while the uniform conferred a status on them that meant they were recognised by the general public.

Other mechanisms of change theorised in the WWWToc were also supported by the data. City Hosts described feeling appreciated by the general public, and by the City of Culture organisation. Various 'perks' were specifically mentioned as making City Hosts feel appreciated, such as the awards for repeated volunteering (e.g. Bronze, Silver and Gold badges), the regular coffee mornings and breakfast brunches. Seeing media coverage of the UK CoC 2021 was also reported to make the City Hosts feel valued. City Hosts were motivated by doing something purposeful and meaningful. A range of skills and experiences were described as having been gained through the City Host role, by both older and younger

volunteers. These included using computers, photography, communication skills, and specific courses including disability awareness and content creation among others. City Hosts talked about enjoying their shifts, specifically enjoying exposure to the outdoors, and about the volunteering programme which gave them structure, routine and/or provided a distraction from other challenges or commitments.

The only mechanism of change which had mixed positive and negative testimony coded to it was 'role demands'. While volunteers liked the flexibility that the City Host programme offered, there was also disappointment when they felt they had attended events where they were not needed (instances of too many City Hosts for the job, or insufficient responsibilities assigned). So while City Hosts approved of the flexibility to commit as little (or as much) as they wanted, once they had committed to a shift, they expected to be needed and if they weren't doing much this prompted negative feelings.

Finally, a mechanism of change emerged from the data which was not included in the WWWToc which was titled 'exposure to culture'. City Hosts reported that the opportunity to take part in the city's cultural events played a part in them accruing benefits from the programme. For some, attendance at cultural events was part of their lives before UK CoC 2021, but this was an opportunity to take part to a greater extent. For others, they might not have been exposed to some types of culture previously but came into contact with it via volunteering and appreciated exposure to something they wouldn't have chosen to see (or had the opportunity to see) in other circumstances.

**Table 5: Mechanisms of change**

Theme	Quotes from the Interviews	Quotes from the surveys
Connecting with others	<p><i>To connect with people, so to build a network, because I no longer have a a network in the UK... I lived in in [Country] that 20 years and in [Country]... So it was to also make connections with people. It's also to to meet new people that are travelling and hear their stories. (P026)</i></p> <p><i>We, we're so good friends and not just ladies. There's all of us you know, students, male, female and it's amazing..., just getting to meet people again, you know. Even if it's the hosts or the public out there, it's just-just really good. It's just like I said, it brings me out of my shell and you know, it's very uplifting. (P022)</i></p>	<p><i>It's been lovely meeting new people of all walks of life and met some great fellow hosts too.</i></p>

Feeling appreciated	<p><i>They do little rewards have like sort of 10 shifts you get a bronze award... I think there's little things that do make you feel appreciated, and I, I and I do think any communication from them is always really positive. (P014)</i></p> <p><i>I think what what's been great some days it's people come up to you and say oh you know you city hosts, you're doing a great job and that's just the general public. Which is lovely. Or, you know, they're really appreciative of if they've asked the way to something or they've asked you some information about about something that you've been able to tell them about. (P025)</i></p>	<p><i>It's good to see the food/hot drink offer too. Little measures like this make the thought of being outside in the cold for long periods more doable, and to feel appreciated.</i></p>
Doing something purposeful and meaningful	<p><i>..and I just felt afterwards when I got home, I just thought, well, that's just really nice. You know those people. They probably needed to have that conversation. (P003)</i></p> <p><i>The sense that I've helped out the people, but also the city and the City of Culture and the events and made [event] run a lot more smoothly. (P006)</i></p>	<p><i>volunteering for city of culture is life satisfaction, is good, doing good for others and the community, which provides me a natural sense of accomplishment.</i></p>
Developing and using skills and experiences	<p><i>Oh yes, yes it has had in terms of just thinking about what my employment skills are. Yeah, so that that's made me think about other job roles that I might be more interested in future. Yeah so promoting Coventry or or or doing doing something along those lines. (P003)</i></p> <p><i>Well, I I do think as I said before, it is important to stay in the world and to and to keep learning. I don't think you are ever too old to learn. And you can't not learn because so much is going on. And I've learned more about uh computers the kind of technical side, if you like, than I knew before...But I am more kind of tecchie aware than I was which is really good. (P012)</i></p>	<p><i>I am also grateful for being given the opportunity to attend courses such as Disability Awareness.</i></p>

Role and group identity	<p><i>Just proud that you're doing something and like belonging to like a team. People that are all together. No, you get yeah when you're wearing the uniform like you're proud to wear it. Like policemen... Well, no, it's real real pride. (P007)</i></p> <p><i>The other thing that surprised me is that people, if you take the talk time to talk to them, and sometimes because you've got the uniform on, will tell you things they wouldn't have told you otherwise. 'cause, I think it has been quite successful and people have got used to seeing us around in our blue uniforms and will come and talk to us now. (P012)</i></p>	<p><i>I feel our [City Host] reputation is strong!!!</i></p> <p><i>I am honoured to be part of the volunteering programme. It's good to be part of a team whilst doing my bit.</i></p>
Enjoyment	<p><i>We have good fun. There's a bit of banter, most of my working life's been in a factory so I know all about banter and um. Yeah, we've had some good fun and I've worked. I'm working with some nice people. And yeah, it's just a pleasure to be doing it to be fair. (P005)</i></p> <p><i>enjoyed them all (P013)</i></p>	<p><i>I have enjoyed the shifts, and have attended a number of different events.</i></p>
Structure, routine, distraction	<p><i>It's probably doing me good 'cause I'm trying not to let my studies overtake everything so like my whole weekend becomes like I'm working, uni and then study all over the weekend. So actually it's probably just good to put a few shifts in and just go self-care really isn't it? (P14)</i></p> <p><i>I think volunteering is a way of being outside yourself for a while and thinking about somebody else. So if you-you need to be away from the situation you're in, uh, being that you're retired and on your own, or if you're married and you just want a break from your partner, I think it's good to do some volunteering because it takes your mind off of your situation. (P020)</i></p>	<p><i>it seemed a great way to finally get out of the house and have some purpose to my weeks which the pandemic had stopped.</i></p>
Exposure to outdoors and nature	<p><i>We've done a lot of walking around on the shifts, so that's always good. Lots of lots of steps, most of them being out in the open air, so it's always useful to get out and about. (P008)</i></p>	-

	<i>It's nice to actually get out into the fresh air. (P016)</i>	
Role demands	<p><i>You could be a leader, or you could be a host. You could take responsibility, you didn't have to. (P020)</i></p> <p><i>There was one there was one at the Coventry Cemetery. It's good to walk around it and get to see it, but then you just sitting about doing nothing. There was very little footfall on it. The lack the lack of things to do at some of the events. Like I said you are just basically present, it's not a lot of hands on, you know it's a bit boring. You come out and spend 4 hours there, you know, it's sort of like watching paint dry. (P002)</i></p>	<p><i>At some events I feel that I do not have enough to do, or that I am an extra body. Other times I am busy and feel I am helping. The latter is preferable.</i></p>
Exposure to culture	<p><i>The richness of what I'm learning about the city, the opportunity to attend some of these events... And so you know, those are things that otherwise I probably wouldn't attend. Uhm, especially when I wasn't working, because if I financially, I couldn't afford it. (P026)</i></p> <p><i>And that particular one was great because I got to talk to the artist because he was there and actually talked through his different paintings and what they meant and also what was happening with them after. (P032)</i></p> <p><i>it's nice to be involved in it in a way that I can afford to be involved in it if that kind of makes sense. (P014)</i></p>	<p><i>I was amused by the rich history, wonderful people and hidden talents that Coventry had hidden.</i></p>

### 4.2.3 INTERMEDIATE OUTCOMES

Intermediate outcomes suggested in the WWWToc were also borne out by testimony from the City Hosts through both interviews and survey data [Table 6]. Not all of these applied to all the City Hosts, and many City Hosts explicitly stated that some of these did not apply to them, for example:

*'I think I've always been a friendly person. I've always been interested in people so I can't say that's changed me. So I'm not really sure. I'm not really any more confident I don't think than I was before.'* (P029)

However, most City Hosts reported one or more of these intermediate outcomes, either:

- a contribution to their purpose, identity, and the meaning of their life,
- better relationships, or
- personal growth and development as a consequence of taking part in the volunteering programme.



**Figure 3**

Photograph posted on, and used with the permission of the City Hosts' Facebook group

Again, this was overwhelmingly positive, with these intermediate outcomes leading to the overall benefits volunteers expressed in terms of their wellbeing. However, there were some very specific negative incidents identified which contributed to City Host stress. These related to difficulties booking shifts and/or feelings of unfairness relating to the booking system, some antagonism between City Hosts and paid staff in one venue – which the City Host felt was not well handled by City of Culture management – and stress relating to a specific event in which the volunteer was not protected from content that was distressing to them. It is worth noting that even these sources of stress did not undermine the overall positive impact of being a City Host for those reporting these issues, although they may have done for others.



**Table 6: Intermediate outcomes**

Theme	Quotes from the interviews	Quotes from the surveys
<p>Purpose, identity and values</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increased sense of purpose and meaning of life</li> <li>• New/developed sense of identity</li> <li>• Expression of altruism/giving back</li> </ul>	<p><i>I want to be the person that I am now. More looking out on life... Looking positive for the future. (P007)</i></p> <p><i>I've seen people blossom, myself included. (P009)</i></p> <p><i>Well, I'd rather help somebody than hinder somebody, um. That might have been not been too apparent when I was younger... (P005)</i></p> <p><i>You know, we've got this uniform now and I would like to be a part of the city and be able to do to do more (P016)</i></p> <p><i>It feels like I'm giving back (P013)</i></p> <p><i>I'm just saying that sort of purposeful thing though. You know, I feel have contributed a little bit (P006)</i></p>	<p><i>Taking me out of my comfort zone and opening my eyes to the wider world.</i></p> <p><i>Really enjoying the opportunity to help my home City, volunteering is a great opportunity for me to give something back to my home town</i></p>
<p>Relationships</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increased social connectedness</li> <li>• Increased sense of belonging/feeling part of something</li> </ul>	<p><i>You know, we're obviously the Coventry people. I've integrated with the, you know, hell of a different community, a young community, very diverse community. (P028)</i></p> <p><i>I've met a couple of people I worked with and lost in touch and there they were. I couldn't believe it. So that was amazing. And one lady, I said, 'I know you! I know you! I know you!'. (P022)</i></p> <p><i>meeting other people and sort of keeping in touch with them. So certainly there are people who I have built friendships with like [name]. (P017)</i></p> <p><i>I I just think being part of something that is a unique experience within the city for the year. (P008)</i></p> <p><i>We might not all feel the same about the hosting but I think it's bringing everyone along the journey and encouraging people to be part of it. (P009)</i></p>	<p><i>It has been a wonderful experience. I feel that I have a new family.</i></p> <p><i>I have met some great people and made a lot of new friends too</i></p>

	<p><i>Being part of a community. And not just sit not just sitting and doing nothing but being being part being part of something. You know, just sort of say well, I was part, you know. Of City of Culture I was I was part, I was part of it, which is what I wanted. (P016)</i></p> <p><i>So there's a good sense of camaraderie... 'cause even though we're all doing it for unknown reasons. You know we're all doing it for one cause which is for the City of Culture. (P018)</i></p>	
<p>Personal growth and development</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increased self-efficacy</li> <li>• Increased self-esteem</li> <li>• Increased confidence</li> </ul>	<p><i>I think as a confidence builder it has been it has been good it has been, this has forced me to try out new things, so I would be less, I'll be less fearful for trying out stuff in the future. (P018)</i></p> <p><i>I guess I'm just more open to talking to people. (P033)</i></p> <p><i>I think it's had a really positive effect. Like I said on my wellbeing and so yeah, just going out and meeting more people... In terms of seeing people and feeling better and feeling, and I think with my confidence as well. (P003)</i></p> <p><i>I would say um so yeah, just, especially recently with doing more shifts that confidence has just increased because just through the the kind of experience and the like, almost like flooding myself with having to be in those situations. (P032)</i></p>	<p><i>I have enjoyed being a City Host. As someone who has autism for me it has helped me come more out of my shell.</i></p> <p><i>I've really enjoyed it but I'm getting a bit tired now.</i></p>

#### 4.2.4 KEY INFLUENCING FACTORS



**Figure 4: City Hosts at Coventry's Big Weekend**

Photograph posted on, and used with the permission of the City Hosts' Facebook group

City Hosts reported a number of barriers and facilitators to getting benefits from volunteering [Table 7]. These included the 'key influencing factors' from the WWWToc [Figure 1], as well as other barriers and facilitators. Volunteers discussed individual circumstances that affected their ability to volunteer, or the impact that volunteering had on them. These were mainly to do with employment, commitments to family (including pets), and medical problems (for example, difficulties standing for long periods or enduring the cold due to disability, illness or injury). Data coded to 'What volunteers do, how much and how often' highlighted that a strength of the City Host programme was the flexibility for hosts to choose exactly what they committed to, to allow them the chance to volunteer even when they had other commitments. Further, this theme also reflected that what volunteers do is important for accruing benefits from volunteering. Specifically, the importance of feeling that what they are doing is genuinely useful. City Hosts did talk about volunteer support and management, including both positive and negative aspects of the City Host programme.

Negatives included the shift booking system, a) because it assumed knowledge of technology that some people found challenging, and b) that it wasn't always seen to be fair. In addition, some City Hosts felt that Team Leaders varied in their level of skills and experience and sometimes were not able to fulfil the role.

And finally, City Hosts had experienced some challenging incidents and occasionally made complaints, which were not quickly or satisfactorily resolved. Generally though, there were more positive than negative data in this theme, including the many ways in which the management showed their appreciation, and sought to build the social connections between the hosts (through the Facebook group and the coffee mornings), responsiveness to City Host questions and in some cases quick adaptations to meet accessibility needs, and the flexibility.

COVID-19 was mentioned by every interviewee and had a large impact on the experience of volunteering as part of UK CoC 2021. This had two main effects. Firstly, for many, City Hosting was a way of re-entering society after the lockdown and restrictions, often facilitating a re-engagement and re-connection with other people. This resulted in a lot of contrasting between the 'lows' of 2020 and the first three months of 2021, compared with 'highs' during UK CoC 2021. Secondly, many City Hosts talked about how they had been able to volunteer despite concerns around COVID-19, for example selecting shifts for outdoor events or feeling confident that those around them were taking precautions that would minimise risk. City Hosts' experiences would no doubt have been different without the backdrop of COVID-19.

**Table 7: Key Influencing Factors, Drivers and Barriers**

Theme	Quotes from interviews	Quotes from Survey
Individual circumstances	<p><i>So I initially, I mean [I completed] the application last year before the City of Culture year was awarded, but there are some delays with the training because I had to attend face to face training, but I couldn't make the slots. And then in the end I ended up doing the online training... there was lots of delay, in my end 'cause I couldn't do the face to face training. (P023)</i></p> <p><i>So ultimately I'm having to fit it round whatever work wants, so I know some people if they are retired they have a bit more time to add to hundreds of shifts, unfortunately, I'm not in that position. (P027)</i></p>	-

	<p><i>As as I started, I got a job. So my intention was to be a team leader. And because I got work, I decided in it, you know, let me let me first will get priorities in the job and see where that takes me. And so I I haven't taken up the role of team leader. Because my work as a consultant means that I travel and I can't, I can't then commit two things in the week I can only commit weekends. (P026)</i></p>	
<p>What volunteers do, how much and how often</p>	<p><i>I think sometimes when I volunteered before for things, sometimes when people know that, I am, you're willing to give your time. Sometimes there's an expectation.</i></p> <p><i>They want you to give more and more time if they know that you're free and available... That's one of the things I like about this programme. It is very flexible. And yeah, you can fit it around work and family. (P003)</i></p> <p><i>I didn't go for the Team Leader because I didn't really want the responsibility. I just wanted to enjoy the experiences. Rather than getting involved with dealing with issues, you know problems and things. So I just decided to do that City Host. (P029)</i></p> <p><i>I really like that I could be anywhere I want. I could pick any shifts I want as much time as I want. (P033)</i></p> <p><i>Um, actual volunteering a lot of the time, you're not doing a lot. Usually the volunteering like we do [in other settings] is hands on and more, um, yeah, more going on. I'm doing the vaccine clinics at the moment so we're busy doing that but, um, with the City of Culture a lot lately is standing about. It might be 3-4 hours, it's not not doing a lot. (P002)</i></p>	<p><i>It has been a great opportunity although I haven't done any hosting yet. I have some booked at the end of the week.</i></p>

<p>Volunteering support and management</p>	<p><i>So probably my biggest sort of like, um, minus is the is the way that the shifts are given out. (P001)</i></p> <p><i>Now, the quality of the Team Leaders in the in the Coventry City of Culture is nowhere near the quality is of the Coventry Ambassadors 'cause they haven't had the training and some of them it didn't even do a shift before they become a Team Leader. (P002)</i></p> <p><i>And I cancelled a couple of sessions and the admin team were absolutely fantastic. I did tell them the reasons why. But they were brilliant and very supportive because they realise it doesn't have to be someone being ill with COVID... So in that sense there's no judgment it's just thanks as long as you let them know, because that's the most important thing. (P009)</i></p> <p><i>Within City of Culture, people said at the start of December they would investigate the whole matter and report back, two months and absolutely nothing. (P004)</i></p> <p><i>I think that they have done well that if there's been a problem, they've tried to address it. (P029)</i></p>	<p><i>Excellent support from the City Host team, love that there are specific social events for the Hosts too.</i></p>
<p>COVID-19</p>	<p><i>2020 was a tough year from going from being in the office five days a week to going on to furlough. Everyone has struggled through the pandemic in one shape or form. It's not. No one's immune, no one's not been affected in some way. (P009)</i></p> <p><i>I've never once felt unsafe doing it. I've always felt you know the right precautions has been in place. And at the, specially when you're like outside and stuff, and in doing roaming shifts, that's definitely sort of, you know, I don't feel like I'm in any sort of danger of catching it and to be fair, everybody is sensible, even doing City Hosts shifts with various people, people sort of say no, no we have to do lateral flow tests, we have to wear masks. (P018)</i></p>	<p><i>It has been a great way to start getting back into the world/socialise after covid.</i></p>

#### 4.2.5 CIVIC PRIDE



Figure 5

Photograph posted on, and used with the permission of the City Hosts' Facebook group

As well as wellbeing impacts, City Hosts discussed their civic pride, with City Hosts unanimously reporting that their role had allowed them to maintain or improve their relationship with Coventry. Many City Hosts talked about their longstanding love of Coventry and taking the chance to be a City Host with an aim to showcase it:

*It's so the main thing is that I just I love Coventry and I know a lot of people don't... Yeah I just love the city I have lived here all my life apart from when I was at university and I just wanted to do what I could to help because I thought that the City of Culture year would be a good way to showcase the city and maybe change people's minds and I really wanted to be part of that. There's also possibly a bit of rebellion in there because my parents are included in the list of people who don't particularly like Coventry... I just wanted to be part of the year somehow and also that I just love Coventry and wanted to be part of showcasing how great it is. (P032)*

Others talked about how their existing love of Coventry has grown throughout the year.

*I think I've always I've been a 'Coventry kid' all my life. So I've seen changes in Coventry, you know, physically. And I think I suppose I've always, you know, because people always go 'sent to Coventry' and make a laugh about it and and and can put Coventry down quite a bit.*

*And I've always been sort of a put up an argument about that, but I think this is made me even more proud of the city... it's it's made me much more proud, prouder than I'm I've ever been, really, about Coventry. Looking forward to the future, when you know they do the redevelopment. But it's it's been emotional as well, at times you know, because some of the things that we've been involved in they've all been different, you know It's just it's it's to me. It's it's been a a really good thing, yeah. (P029)*

A third group talked about re-discovering a love of Coventry, sometimes just because it has given them more exposure to the city centre which they might have been avoiding in recent years.

*When the new cathedral was built, which isn't so new now. I I really thought it was awful because I was in my teens and it was very modern and compared to the old cathedral, pretty sort of garish. I thought I go in now if I'm on duty and it's so peaceful and lovely and I look at the windows and I know a bit more about them now and that makes quite a difference. (P012)*

And finally, there were participants who got to know Coventry for the first time through the City Host role.

*I think that well, this is really a good opportunity for me to to learn about this city and as well as the country. So assuming like well, and once I arrived UK, I must just apply for it and this really attracts me the most because I saw like because in this city there's lots of history. (P031)*

*So this was my kind of the goal to meet people and know more about Coventry because I really wanted to get invested in the history of Coventry. (P033)*

#### **4.2.6 OTHER**

As well as wellbeing benefits and increased civic pride, City Hosts talked about physical health benefits from walking, being in the sunshine and from wanting to maintain their weight in order to fit into their uniform.

*While lockdown was on and everyone was sort of free eating and drinking and you know, not not doing very much. I gained weight and my cholesterol was right... so I did do something about it and I halved my cholesterol, and lost two stone, if I hadn't lost that two stone, I would not have volunteered. I would not have been a City Host because I wouldn't have wanted to tell them what size uniform I needed. (P012)*





Figure 6

Photograph posted on, and used with the permission of the City Hosts' Facebook group. It was also clear that the City Host programme had built a cadre of trained and willing volunteers who would be keen to volunteer in Coventry and elsewhere, for example the Commonwealth Games in Birmingham, which many City Hosts had already signed up to support at the time of their interviews. For some this is continuing a life in which they have frequently volunteered in various ways, but for others City Hosting was their first experience and made them feel like it was something worth continuing to do.

*And then I think I think the City of Culture ends in May and the Commonwealth Games starts in June, perfect. (P004)*

*No, I'll still keep going. I'll still keep going 'cause I'm still doing like the food bank and the lunch club and that and if any more volunteering work comes though. If I can do it, I'll do it. (P007)*

*I have an interest in becoming an ambassador afterwards for the city. So having started it, it's probably something I would carry on. (P008)*

*Once you catch the volunteering bug... you continue to do it really. (P027)*

*I like really like City of Culture. I don't know if I can find something like that again like city hosting. Which is quite sad, but I'm thinking maybe like [organisation] has like a lot of opportunities for volunteering. Maybe I'll try that. We'll see how it goes, but definitely I want it to be a part of my life. (P033)*



There was a keen sense that City Hosts hoped (or in some cases even expected) that they would not be dissolved at the end of UK CoC 2021 but would continue to have opportunities to do City Hosting.

*I don't think they will just disband the city hosts. I could be wrong, but I don't think they will. (P012)*

*So yeah, I'd like to carry on, it's gonna be sad when it does end. And we're like, oh, what now, you know? We need more to come out of it, really. (P022)*

*We've been told that it's gonna be a legacy and we're all gonna carry on doing it. Cause there's always things going on in Coventry throughout the year and they've asked us all to stay on, so I shall continue to do it. (P029)*

## 5. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

The aim of this focus study was to understand how and to what extent the volunteering programme impacted on those taking part, particularly in terms of their subjective wellbeing and civic pride.

### 5.1 VOLUNTEERING IS LIKELY TO HAVE BOOSTED WELLBEING FOR CITY HOSTS

Quantitative data suggest that City Hosts had measurably higher mental wellbeing than the general population of Coventry, including the subset of Coventry residents who usually take part in volunteering. The quantitative findings are difficult to interpret however for two key reasons: i) The Coventry Household Survey was completed during a period of lockdown and stringent restriction, during the winter of 2021 when it is widely reported that mental wellbeing declined nationally (Office for Health Improvement and Disparities, 2022) therefore, it might be expected that a general population sample would also have had higher mental wellbeing at the later time points, when the City Host surveys were completed; ii) Despite considerable effort by the City of Culture Trust and EnV, response rates to the survey were lower than anticipated, (usually researchers aim for response rates of over 70%, but the response rate for the City host survey was less than 20%). This means there is high chance of selection bias in these findings, i.e. the people who responded to the survey may not have been typical of all volunteers. Generally, selection bias polarises results, with respondents more likely to be people with ‘something to say’ most often particularly positive or negative. Even if the finding was not vulnerable to bias or confounding, it is not possible to say whether City Hosts had higher SWEMWBS scores because the volunteer programme improved their wellbeing, as it is also possible that those with higher wellbeing chose to volunteer.

In the qualitative study, City Hosts reported in interviews and in the open text of the survey that volunteering had improved their wellbeing and also provided examples of the ways in which the volunteer programme had made this impact, supporting all the theoretical pathways to better wellbeing in a pre-existing evidence-based theory of change linking volunteering to wellbeing (the WWWToc, see Figure 1). City Hosts also reported an additional pathway, not included in the WWWToc, in which exposure to culture improved their wellbeing.

Taken together, despite the limitations of the quantitative data, it does seem likely that City Hosts had better wellbeing than the general population of Coventry, and it also seems likely that it was taking part in the City Host programme that was at least partly responsible for their better wellbeing. Longitudinal studies that collect data from people before, during and after volunteering, would answer the question of causality more definitively.

## 5.2 VOLUNTEERING MAY HAVE INCREASED CITY HOST CIVIC PRIDE

There was a significant association between volunteering status and civic pride in our quantitative analysis. As above, there are perhaps reasons to be cautious in interpreting the quantitative data. Qualitative data suggested that many City Hosts had pre-existing high levels of civic pride, or positive feelings towards Coventry, but that this may have been strengthened through the City Host volunteering.

## 5.3 IMPLICATIONS FOR CITY OF CULTURE 2021 STORY OF CHANGE

The findings of this focus study contribute to the UK CoC 2021 Story of Change, relating to three specific outcomes.

- Increase in civic pride
- Community-led production and programming increases cultural participation and activism
- Cultural sector activity makes a significant contribution to the economic, environmental, social and health and wellbeing targets for the city and the region.

Firstly, the study finds that civic pride was high among City Hosts (as among other Coventry residents who volunteer) and that it may have been strengthened through volunteering as a City Host. Secondly, the study provides evidence that volunteering as a City Host has inspired cultural participation and activism. Notably, a) it allowed individuals to engage with the UK CoC 2021 events, including events they would not otherwise have considered, and b) many City Hosts are actively seeking further opportunities to volunteer, sometimes as part of a lifelong pattern of volunteering but also having been introduced to volunteering for the first-time during UK CoC 2021. Thirdly, this study provides good evidence that the UK CoC 2021 City Host volunteers are likely to have experienced wellbeing benefits as a result of volunteering and one of the mechanisms for this was their exposure to cultural events as part of the UK CoC 2021 year.

## 5.4 IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICY AND PRACTICE

This focus study adds to the evidence that links volunteering to wellbeing, and the qualitative data in particular suggest that volunteering as a City Host probably causally contributed to better wellbeing for the volunteers involved.

Strengths of the City Host programme, that likely helped to drive wellbeing benefits, and therefore recommendations for other volunteering programmes include:

1. Some attention to all the key mechanisms of change: while two key mechanisms of change are discussed below, it was notable that City Host interview participants' discussion was found to include references to every one of the mechanisms of change within the WWWToc i.e.: (i) connecting with others, (ii) feeling appreciated, (iii) doing something purposeful and meaningful, (iv) developing and using skills and experiences, (v) role and group identity, (vi) enjoyment, (vii) structure, routine and distraction, (viii) exposure to outdoors and nature and (ix) role demands.

They also talked about ‘exposure to culture’, a further mechanism of change missing from the existing WWWTtoC. While the two mechanisms highlighted below seem to be particularly important as mediating the benefits City Hosts accrued, by designing a volunteering programme with every mechanism of change in mind, it may be that benefits are greater and felt by more volunteers.

2. Opportunities to make social connections: one of the strongest themes arising from our qualitative data related to the mechanism of change ‘connecting with others’ and intermediate outcome ‘increased social connectedness’. By ensuring that volunteers have the chance to meet other people through volunteering (including other volunteers, as well as the public or other beneficiaries of the volunteering activity), this maximises the opportunities to foster social connectedness that was so valued by the City Hosts.
3. A strong role and group identity: another key theme arising from the qualitative data was around the strong identity City Hosts had. This related to the mechanism of change ‘role and group identity’ and to the intermediate outcome ‘increased sense of belonging’. For the City Hosts, the uniform played a role in this, making City Hosts visible at many events across Coventry, helping to build a reputation and identity.
4. Flexibility offered to volunteers: allowing City Hosts to match their volunteering commitments to their available time and energy was discussed by many as facilitating their participation in the programme, as well as ensuring that what they were doing fitted in with their wider lives. This suggests that where other volunteer programmes can offer flexibility it will promote volunteering for people with a wide range of personal circumstances, while protecting volunteers from burn-out.

Weaknesses of the City Host programme, for other volunteering programmes to avoid include:

1. Overbooking volunteers or recruiting volunteers without there being clear responsibilities for those turning up: a lack of responsibility when volunteering is likely to diminish the intermediate outcomes of ‘sense of purpose’ and ‘expression of altruism’ that are needed to realise positive wellbeing impacts.
2. Perceived fairness of shift distribution: volunteers discussed difficulties on booking on to shifts, or the perception that some volunteers were able to get more of the highly sought-after shifts. Where necessary, considering how shifts/activities or responsibilities will be distributed fairly, could reduce the stress caused here.



## 5.5 CONCLUSION

Our study suggests that the City Host programme increased City Host wellbeing and that this was achieved through a number of mechanisms, particularly through increasing social connectedness and increasing a sense of belonging. Civic pride was also high among City Hosts and volunteering may have had a causal role in this. We have identified strengths of the City Host programme that other volunteer programmes could emulate to promote positive outcomes for their volunteers.

## **APPENDIX 1: GLOSSARY OF TERMS**

COVID-19 – Coronavirus Disease 2019

DCMS – Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport

SWEMWBS – Short Warwick Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale

UK CoC 2021 – Coventry UK City of Culture 2021

WWWToC – What Works Wellbeing Theory of Change (for the impact of volunteering on mental wellbeing)

## APPENDIX 2: BIBLIOGRAPHY

Maccagnan A, Wren-Lewis S, Brown H, Taylor T. *Wellbeing and Society: Towards Quantification of the Co-benefits of Wellbeing*. Soc Indic Res 2018 1411. 2018;141:217–43. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11205-017-1826-7>

Mair J, Chien PM, Kelly SJ, Derrington S. *Social impacts of mega-events: a systematic narrative review and research agenda*. *Journal of Sustainable Tourism*. 2020. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09669582.2020.1870989>

Neelands Jonothan, Henry Nick, De Souza Valerie, Beer Haley, Evans Samantha, Anzel Andrew, Healey Tim, Chun Lam Si, Scott Mark. *Coventry City of Culture 2021 Performance Measurement and Evaluation Strategy 2019 – 2024 V2*. Coventry: 2020. p. 9. URL: [https://coventry21evaluation.info/wp-content/uploads/2022/06/city-of-culture\\_pme-strategy\\_jan20.pdf](https://coventry21evaluation.info/wp-content/uploads/2022/06/city-of-culture_pme-strategy_jan20.pdf) (accessed 1 August 2022)

Ng Fat L, Scholes S, Boniface S *et al*. Evaluating and establishing national norms for mental wellbeing using the short Warwick–Edinburgh Mental Well-being Scale (SWEMWBS): findings from the Health Survey for England. *Qual Life Res* 26, 1129–1144 (2017). <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11136-016-1454-8>

Office for Health Improvement and Disparities. *COVID-19 mental health and wellbeing surveillance report*. April 2022. URL: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-mental-health-and-wellbeing-surveillance-report> (accessed 28 July 2022)

Stuart J, Kamerāde D, Connolly S, Ellis Paine A, Nichols G, Grotz, J. (2020) *The Impacts of Volunteering on the Subjective Wellbeing of Volunteers: A Rapid Evidence Assessment*, What Works Centre for Wellbeing and Spirit of 2012 [online] What Works Centre for Wellbeing. URL: [https://whatworkswellbeing.org/wp-content/uploads/1920/10/volunteer-wellbeing-Oct-20\\_briefing.pdf](https://whatworkswellbeing.org/wp-content/uploads/1920/10/volunteer-wellbeing-Oct-20_briefing.pdf) (accessed 28 July 2022)