

New research demonstrates synergy between social cohesion and volunteering

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There is a virtuous circle between volunteering and social cohesion, offering wider benefits to communities according to new research led by Kent and Belong—the Cohesion and Integration Network.

The new research found a [positive relationship](#) between volunteering and social cohesion—the sense of solidarity and connection that people have with their [local area](#) and society at large—from the analysis of a decade's worth of evidence in the UK. The paper, "[The Causal Relationship Between Volunteering and Social Cohesion: A Large Scale Analysis of Secondary Longitudinal Data](#)," is published by *Social Indicators Research*.

The research team led by Professor Dominic Abrams at Kent's School of Psychology identified that when people feel part of a more cohesive community, they are more likely to volunteer to support others. Furthermore, those who volunteer to support others subsequently come to feel they are part of a more cohesive community. These effects were found both when tested over a period of a few months and also when examined over a period of several years.

The findings provide important learning for local and [national government](#) looking to build and maintain social cohesion; and civil society organizations looking to build engagement among under-represented communities:

- The power of volunteering to build an increased sense of trust, pride in place and connection between people from differing backgrounds
- The power of social cohesion to increase involvement from people—particularly from minority, disadvantaged and under-represented backgrounds—in community activities and local causes
- The power of both to increase overall resilience within a community in the face of potential division and through challenging times

Findings from the research have been used to create a free, online toolkit

"The Power of Connection" available to any volunteer-involving organization to use. The toolkit was created in partnership with some of the UK's largest charities and non-profit organizations as part of the Shaping the Future coalition.

Professor Dominic Abrams, director of the Center for the Study of Group Processes within Kent's School of Psychology, said, "Taken together with our earlier research demonstrating the benefits of government investments in local social cohesion, these findings reinforce the view that establishing the building blocks of social cohesion is vital for improving people's lives. Supporting voluntary activity is one of the key elements of this process which has relatively low costs but yields clear indirect as well as direct benefits for communities."

Mike Waite, Interim CEO of Belong—the Cohesion and Integration Network said, "This research provides robust evidence of the positive links between volunteering and social cohesion—there is huge scope here to use the research findings to improve the lives of people in communities around the UK.

"This research should be of significant interest to any volunteer-involving organization or anyone working to build stronger communities better able to withstand divisive narratives and challenges to cohesion. We're already engaging several civil society organizations to support them in using the Power of Connection toolkit to strengthen their communities and look forward to engaging others and the wider [social cohesion](#) sector in using this valuable research."

More information: Ben Davies et al, The Causal Relationship Between Volunteering and Social Cohesion: A Large Scale Analysis of Secondary Longitudinal Data, *Social Indicators Research* (2024). [DOI: 10.1007/s11205-023-03268-6](https://doi.org/10.1007/s11205-023-03268-6)

Provided by University of Kent

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