



**Nacoa and its Volunteers:
The Contribution
of the
Nacoa Foundation Training Programme**

A report produced for Nacoa by
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April 2013



**The Queen's Award
for Voluntary Service**

The MBE for volunteer groups

Preface

This project and report was funded entirely by the time and goodwill of the staff and volunteers of Nacoa. This report is therefore dedicated to them.

Acknowledgements

Thank you to all those who participated in this research. Your time, generosity, and expertise are much appreciated. The issues raised within the report are the result of your contributions, but the conclusions drawn are my own.

I would like to thank Cassandra Ohlson for being a helpful, generous and conscientious project manager and to Alan Leigh for IT and general support. Thanks also to Jenny Palmer for warm welcomes and style tips, and to Martin Williams who is the speediest research arbiter of all time.

With special thanks to Hilary Henriques for her leadership, encouragement, and generosity.

And finally to all at Nacoa; it is a pleasure to know you and I look forward to working with you and making lots of tea for many years to come.

About the Author

Dr Anne-Marie Barron has worked as a researcher for over 25 years, both in academic institutions and in private practice. She is a Chartered Psychologist and an Associate Fellow of the British Psychological Society.

After qualifying as a teacher of children with special educational needs, she achieved a PhD at the University of Wales, Cardiff, for her work on the impact of social interaction on learning and cognitive achievement. At the University of Sheffield she conducted a Home Office funded project which led to the publication of *Resigners: The Experience of Black and Asian Police Officers* (Macmillan), of which Anne-Marie is co-author with Professor Simon Holdaway. She became a Research Fellow at the University of Leeds, subsequently becoming an Honorary Research Fellow, and is currently a member of the University's Institute for Lifelong Learning.

In 1994 Anne-Marie co founded a research practice, Leigh & Barron Consulting. The company has mainly specialised in the research and development of policy and standards for national qualifications. As Director of Research, she has led projects for a number of national government departments and industry/sector organisations, covering Education; Training and Development; Advice, Guidance, and Counselling; Museums, Galleries, and Archives; Publishing; Engineering; Manufacturing; Logistics; IT; Management; and Health. Anne-Marie led a Department of Health initiative to produce competences for Research Ethics Committees. For Skills for Health, the Sector Skills Council for Health, she produced national occupational standards and guidelines to support the National Service Frameworks for those working with children, older people, and people with long term neurological conditions.

Anne-Marie has worked with a number of charities and produced a report on the management of hospice volunteering in 2008. She is a member of Epilepsy Action and active in their Research Network. She also serves as a member of the Scientific Awards Panel which considers applications for research funding and recommends which studies should be funded. Anne-Marie undertook the Nacoa Foundation Training Programme in 2010 and has contributed to the Helpline since that time.

Executive Summary

Introduction to the Project

Nacoa is a lifeline for many children and others affected by alcohol, and it continues to deliver the message to children that their parent's alcohol problems are not their fault and they are not alone. Nacoa has only a small number of paid staff which manages the organisation and coordinates the volunteers. Nacoa is an organisation that functions because of the commitment of its volunteers, and without them it would not be possible for it to undertake the work it has been doing since 1990.

Nacoa has recognised the importance of volunteer training since its inception. Nacoa developed the current Foundation Training Programme in 2002 and has trained over 1,000 volunteers since that time. The six-week training course is mandatory for those who wish to work for or volunteer at Nacoa as helpline or speaker volunteers. The primary aim of the training is to educate volunteers around the issues of alcohol dependency and how this may affect the individual concerned and others, their family (in particular the children), and their friends.

This project was commissioned by Nacoa to enable its volunteers to contribute to the ongoing development of its training programme. The project used both quantitative and qualitative research methods to obtain information from Nacoa volunteers about their experience of volunteer training and how this has contributed to the aims of Nacoa, their role as a volunteer, and to their everyday life. Other relevant research and records were also analysed to assist in the presentation of the results.

The Research Results

The complete results of the research are presented in the full report, and what follows here is a brief summary. There were 50 questionnaire responses, representing a 25% response rate, and providing a good cross-section of Nacoa volunteers. In addition 12 interviews were undertaken to provide depth and context to the research.

The most favoured reason for becoming involved with Nacoa was to promote the wellbeing of children (72%), with gaining experience of counselling the second most favoured (54%). Nearly half of volunteers provided between 7 and 12 hours a month, but there were variations depending on their overall length of service. When volunteers were asked about the factors that prevented them from volunteering, work commitments was the reason cited by 54%, followed by family/social commitments and time at 36% each, and distance scoring 30%.

In relation to the main roles volunteers have performed currently and in the past, there were five that appeared to be particularly favoured: promoting the aims of Nacoa, helpline activities, fundraising,

helping at events, and research activities. Of the more specific aspects of volunteer activities, the top four favourite were: answering calls on the helpline, working on the helpline generally, being part of a volunteer-focused organisation, and meeting others committed to the same cause.

The Nacoa Foundation Training Programme was found to be very helpful in becoming a Nacoa volunteer (scoring 92%), but was also found to be helpful in activities beyond Nacoa (scoring 84%). Different aspects of the Nacoa organisational structure were also highly scored as providing support to volunteers. This was also the case for Nacoa's social activities, including its annual Awards Evening.

The questionnaire respondents provided a number of comments to expand on the above data, as well as providing suggestions for improving volunteering at Nacoa. They also provided examples of how Nacoa had affected their lives or the lives of those around them, including for some coming to terms with their own family history or helping choose a career path.

A representative sample of volunteers were selected for interview to provide a fuller picture of volunteering at Nacoa. The interviews covered their experience of the Foundation Training Programme, and their relationship to and overall experience of working at Nacoa. As a result of these discussions further insights emerged, including the factors affecting recruitment and retention of volunteers, experiences of the training process and suggestions for developing it, and the important role that Nacoa's organisational ethos, policies and procedures have in fashioning the volunteer experience. Some of the volunteers were also able to share their personal experience of how working at Nacoa has contributed to their own lives. While each person's experience of Nacoa is clearly unique to them, perhaps the unifying theme that emerges is that of the volunteers feeling that they have joined a community of people who share common goals.

A further perspective on volunteering is provided by considering research undertaken by other policy and academic bodies, and focuses on a number of aspects. Firstly there is research into the role of volunteering in society in general. Secondly, there is research relating to the specific motives of volunteers. Thirdly, there is research conducted in relation to volunteer training. Fourthly, there is the issue of volunteer turnover and attrition. Finally, there is the issue of repeat callers. The outcomes of this wider research help to illuminate the findings and suggestions that follow in the report.

Findings and Suggestions

It is clear that Nacoa has developed a people-focused model of volunteering that suits its objectives, which is to work closely to promote the needs of an extremely vulnerable group of individuals. This model of volunteering has its difficulties in terms of resources and commitment, but at the same time it has many advantages. Perhaps the foremost of these advantages is that in effect Nacoa has created a community which is greater than the active volunteers delivering its current operational activities. The people in this community, the staff, volunteers, and users, are bound together in a number of ways, e.g. through the helpline, but in the future more and more through social media.

Nacoa works hard to train and support its volunteers and this develops the individual volunteers and the organisation as a whole and contributes to achieving its aims. The research revealed many benefits that derive both directly and indirectly from the Foundation Training Programme. As a result of volunteering at Nacoa:

- Volunteers contribute to the work and development of Nacoa and are proud of this.
- Volunteers are brought together by a better and shared understanding of the issues around alcohol and how individuals and families deal with this.
- Volunteers develop capabilities and experience that improves their skills set and promotes their life chances.
- Volunteers increase their self-confidence, well-being and connection with others.
- Volunteers are keen to 'spread the word' about the work of Nacoa and continue to do this even when they have ceased to volunteer in a formal capacity.

This research illustrates how important volunteering is to Nacoa and to the volunteers themselves. Nacoa continues to encourage and support its volunteers to contribute in a variety of ways. The reality of coordinating volunteers is challenging, and it is important that it is appreciated how much resource is necessary to achieve this. This approach recognises the constraints and other commitments that the volunteers face, and at the same time values the contribution that they can provide.

At the current time there appears to be an equilibrium in the organisation, where the different requirements of staff, volunteers, and other stakeholders are combined in such a way as to produce an extremely effective body which exists on extremely limited funds, but has the support of a large number of people, and the gratitude of countless more. As such it is not difficult to conclude that Nacoa is indeed impressive for its size, and a model of good practice. This is supported by the awards it has received and the feedback from Nacoa volunteers and users of the helpline. Currently this particular model of volunteering works for Nacoa, and any changes should be evolutionary and incremental.

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Nacoa and its Volunteers: The Contribution of the Nacoa Foundation Training Programme

Introduction

Nacoa is a lifeline for many children and others affected by alcohol, and it continues to deliver the message to children that their parent's alcohol problems are not their fault and they are not alone. Nacoa has only a small number of paid staff which manages the organisation and coordinates the volunteers. Nacoa is an organisation that functions because of the commitment of its volunteers, and without them it would not be possible for it to undertake the work it has been doing since 1990.

The volunteers fulfil a multitude of roles in Nacoa. To understand the contribution of volunteers, it is important to recognise how they relate to the aims of Nacoa, which are:

- 1 To offer information, advice and support to children of alcohol-dependent parents.
- 2 To reach professionals who work with these children.
- 3 To raise their profile in the public consciousness.
- 4 To promote research into:
 - a) the particular problems faced by those who grow up with parental alcoholism;
 - b) the prevention of alcoholism developing in this vulnerable group of children.

All volunteers entering the organisation will be involved to some extent in the operation of the helpline. The helpline enables children of alcoholics and others affected by alcoholism to discuss their concerns, and also enables professionals in medicine, education, social work, and the voluntary sector to obtain information on alcoholism in families. Volunteers are active in fundraising, and in providing outreach education programmes. They are also involved in the policy-making process of the organisation, both through informal meetings and volunteer monthly meetings, and on the board of trustees. It is no exaggeration to suggest that without the volunteers Nacoa would be unable to operate in the way it does.

Nacoa is rightly proud of its volunteer history and has received many awards over the years for its work with volunteers, among them the following:

- In 2005 the Chief Executive, Hilary Henriques, was awarded the *Bristol Lord Mayor's Medal* for training over 500 volunteers, and the *MBE* in the Queen's Birthday Honours List for services to Nacoa.
- In 2006 Nacoa was a winner of the *Guardian Charity Awards*.
- In 2008 Nacoa was awarded a *Certificate of Merit* by Mentor UK.
- In 2010 Hilary Henriques received the *Women of the Year Outstanding Achievement Award* and was featured in a Comic Relief publication 'Inspiring Women'.
- In 2010 the charity's leadership was highly commended by *The Beacon Fellowship* in recognition of an outstanding contribution to charitable and social causes and received the *Excellence in Training Award* from Young Bristol.
- In 2012 Nacoa was awarded the *Meritorious Service Award* by NACoA (USA).
- In 2012 Nacoa was awarded *The Queen's Award for Voluntary Service*. This award recognises outstanding achievement by groups of volunteers who regularly devote their time to helping others in the community, improving the quality of life and opportunity for others, and providing an outstanding service.

Nacoa's contribution is such that that it has attracted the support of many high profile patrons. Its activities, both in Bristol and further afield, attract much attention, e.g. UPFEST (The Urban Paint Festival), and COA Week (Children of Alcoholics Week). For such a small organisation it is impressive how much it continues to achieve. A large part of its success is due to its desire to innovate and change, and its ability to embrace the internet and social media is testament to this (at the time of writing it has completely redesigned and relaunched its website).

As part of this continuing process of renewal, Nacoa recognises the importance of allowing its volunteers to participate in its future development. This report is an opportunity for volunteers to look back on their training after having been a volunteer for some time, consider their experiences, and suggest any changes to improve it.

Section 1 Background to the Report

Volunteer training in Nacoa

Nacoa has recognised the importance of volunteer training since its inception. Nacoa developed the current Foundation Training Programme in 2002 and has trained over 1,000 volunteers since that time. The six-week training course is mandatory for those who wish to work for or volunteer at Nacoa as helpline or speaker volunteers¹. The primary aim of the training is to educate volunteers around the issues of alcohol dependency and how this may affect the individual concerned and others, their family (in particular the children), and their friends. The volunteers look at issues related to alcoholism, from the neurochemistry of alcohol to the problems that children of alcohol-dependent parents may face. Volunteers spend time exploring how different sources of support can help those who are affected by someone else's drinking.

Most importantly, volunteers are trained in listening skills and equipped with an understanding of how to work with vulnerable people in a helpline setting. Volunteers use the training directly when they provide support to those who contact the helpline. In addition, the training informs the day to day interactions of volunteers with others, i.e. friends, family and colleagues.

Nacoa asks that volunteers who sign up for the training commit to 3 hours a week at Nacoa for 12 months when they have completed the training. They are provided with a mentor (an experienced volunteer) who, wherever possible, coordinates with them so that they can provide advice and guidance during the first months of the volunteer's contribution.

Objectives of the research

Nacoa has commissioned this report to enable its volunteers to contribute to the ongoing development of its training programme. The research has been designed to obtain information from Nacoa volunteers about their experience of volunteer training and how this has contributed to the aims of Nacoa, their role as a volunteer, and to their everyday life.

The research also presents an opportunity to explore some of the factors that might have an impact on the volunteers' experience at Nacoa. While a number of volunteers have worked for Nacoa for many years, other volunteers continue for a limited period only. Although it is very rare for anyone to not complete the training programme, some volunteers do not continue to volunteer afterwards. The

¹ For ease of reference we will refer to those undertaking the course as volunteers, as there are only a few staff members and any attendance at the course by them is usually in the role of instructor.

reasons behind these different outcomes could help inform further development of the training process in Nacoa.

The research for the project was undertaken during 2012, a year in which the importance of investing in volunteers was especially highlighted by the role of the Games Makers at the London Olympic and Paralympic Games. In the light of this it is suitable to place Nacoa's training programme in a broader perspective. This includes consideration of some of the relevant research and discussion papers that have been produced by academic and policy groups.

Research methodology

The research used both quantitative and qualitative methods to obtain and analyse information, and the results are presented both statistically and discursively. This has involved the design and delivery of a questionnaire, which was made available online, electronically (Word™ document), and in printed formats. The questionnaire was then supplemented by a number of interviews, which were conducted face to face and via telephone. The four main stages to the project are listed below, followed by a brief summary for each of them.

Stage 1 Review of Nacoa materials and development of the questionnaire (October 2011–February 2012)

A review of Nacoa materials which are held at its office was conducted, including any relevant reports and previous evaluation exercises. In addition, information on volunteer activities was collated from Nacoa's records. These materials provided a rich source of data which informed the development of the questionnaire.

The questionnaire was designed to primarily provide quantitative data on the respondents' views on training, but we also wanted to provide volunteers with the opportunity to expand on their answers if they wished, so we included six additional open questions where they could give their own narrative responses. Throughout its design an important consideration was the need to obtain high quality feedback whilst balancing the need to minimise the amount of time it took for respondents to complete the questionnaire.

The draft of the questionnaire was revised several times following feedback and discussions. The questionnaire (see Appendix A) was finalised in February.

Stage 2 Questionnaire dissemination and analysis
(March 2012–May 2012)

The questionnaire was sent out in March by email to over 200 volunteers on the Nacoa contact database who had undertaken the Nacoa Foundation Training Programme between 2003-2011. The research needed to obtain the views of those who are taking an active role in Nacoa, along with those who are not currently taking an active role in Nacoa. While the Nacoa records are regularly maintained and updated, there is the inevitable problem of volunteers deleting or moving their email address, so we cannot be sure of the exact number of people who did receive the email.

We were keen to be as flexible as possible with regard to collecting the data, so the questionnaire was made available in three modes: as a Word™ document that could be completed electronically and then emailed back, as a paper version for those who wanted to complete it by hand and return it by post; and finally a version which could be completed online, with a direct link from the email.

We received 50 completed questionnaires by the end of April 2012. The majority of the respondents, 33 in fact, used the online questionnaire, while 12 used the Word™ version, and 5 used the paper version. Given the size of the original dissemination list, this represents approximately a 25% return, which is high for this type of policy research.

The questionnaire results were analysed using Excel™. The results were reviewed and used to inform the development of the interview schedule (see below).

Stage 3 Development of interview schedule and interviews
(May 2012–October 2012)

The aim of the interviews was to provide further depth and context to the questionnaire results. The semi-structured interview schedule was developed (see Appendix B) by reviewing the earlier research and the results of the questionnaire. This was then reviewed and amended after consultation.

It was envisaged that given the time and resources available, we would aim to interview a minimum of 10 individuals, which would be the number required to reflect the different age groups, sex, types of volunteer role undertaken, and cohort group (when they undertook the Foundation Training Programme). Half of those who responded to the questionnaire put themselves forward for interview, which is a very high proportion. Therefore we had a possible sample of 25 individuals, from which 15 individuals were selected for interview based on the sample criteria listed above. This was more than the 10 required, but this was needed in order to respond to the practical difficulties of arranging interviews, and the desire not to miss the opportunity to interview people who had moved away from the Bristol area. The 15 individuals were contacted by email and/or phone, and as a result 12

interviews were undertaken between May and October 2012. Eight of these were face to face interviews taking place at a venue selected by the interviewee, and 4 were undertaken by phone.

Face to face interviews took between 50–100 minutes, and phone interviews between 20–60 minutes. Research participants were assured that their contributions would remain anonymous. All the interviews were carried out by the author of this report. During the interviews non-verbatim notes were taken of the discussions.

***Stage 4 Analysis of the results and production of the report
(October 2012 – March 2013)***

The interview notes were analysed by the researcher to identify the key issues and themes that were emerging. Some of these derived directly from the questions provided by the interview schedule, while others arose from more general discussion. The analysis was repeated several times, and this iterative process helped identify issues and themes that were not immediately apparent. The questionnaire results were also reviewed in relation to the interview results.

Finally, this report has been produced. In March the draft report was discussed with the project manager. The findings and suggestions are the author's alone.

Section 2 Questionnaire Results

The results of the questionnaire are presented below. In addition to the results for the overall sample, the results for a number of the questions have been analysed for the following categories: all respondents, males, females, and the five age groups that responded (we did not receive any responses for people aged between 55-64 and 75 and over). After each data set we provide a brief commentary on the results purely based on the questionnaire itself. Information and views obtained from the interviews are provided in the next section.

Sample data

This question was designed to provide data on the age and sex of the respondents, along with a question about whether they were undertaking further education at the time of completing the Nacoa Foundation Training Programme.

What is your current age?							What sex?		Student during training?	
18-24	25-34	35-44	45-54	55-64	65-74	75+	Male	Female	Yes	No
24%	36%	18%	20%	0%	2%	0%	24%	76%	44%	56%

From the total number of questionnaires received, which was 50, the majority of respondents were aged under 35. In addition, three quarters of the respondents are female; while this might seem unrepresentative, this reflects the volunteer population of Nacoa and volunteering generally. The questionnaire also asked whether they were students in further or higher education during training, with the result that just under half of those who responded stated they were. This allowed us to analyse whether there are any substantial differences between the students or non-students in responding to subsequent questions. In the actual results, there is no marked difference between the students and non-students data, so we have not included this data in the following tables.

Question 1 For how long have you volunteered for Nacoa?

The first question relates to how long the respondents have volunteered for Nacoa.

Q1 For how long have you volunteered for Nacoa? (percentages of total respondents)			
1=6mths or less	7-12mths	13-24mths	24mths+
30%	14%	26%	30%

From the above results, approximately one third of those who responded have volunteered for longer than two years, while a third had volunteered for less than six months. The latter group of volunteers might be more represented in the research sample because they were relatively new to Nacoa, and have had more exposure to the existence of the questionnaire. Nonetheless the results do indicate that the questionnaire was completed by volunteers with varying lengths of service. It has to be recognised that the questionnaire was mainly answered by those who still have some level of active

commitment to Nacoa, so any results should be viewed in this context. For various reasons, obtaining feedback from people who no longer have an involvement with Nacoa is not practical given the resources at our disposal.

Question 2 Why did you get involved in volunteering at Nacoa?

This question was designed to identify some of the factors that led individuals to volunteer at Nacoa. For this question we have provided the results according to all respondents, sex, and age groups.

Q2 Why did you get involved in volunteering at Nacoa? (percentages of total in each category)								
	ALL	M	F	18-24	25-34	35-44	45-54	65-74
Personal experience as a child of parent(s) with alcohol problems	38.0%	33.3%	39.5%	66.7%	27.8%	22.2%	40.0%	0.0%
Personal experience of alcohol problems with self or others	28.0%	33.3%	26.3%	0.0%	27.8%	22.2%	70.0%	0.0%
Interested in promoting the wellbeing of children	72.0%	50.0%	78.9%	58.3%	77.8%	66.7%	80.0%	100.0%
To gain experience of working with children	30.0%	16.7%	34.2%	16.7%	33.3%	44.4%	30.0%	0.0%
To gain experience of counselling	54.0%	50.0%	55.3%	50.0%	50.0%	77.8%	50.0%	0.0%
Looked at a variety of charities and decided that I had most to contribute to Nacoa	44.0%	33.3%	47.4%	50.0%	27.8%	55.6%	50.0%	100.0%

When we asked the reasons for volunteering, the most favoured one for all respondents was to promote the wellbeing of children (72%), with female and older volunteers particularly favouring this reason. The second most favoured reason overall was gaining experience of counselling (54%), which was particularly favoured by those between the ages of 35-44. Personal experience as a child of a parent or parents with alcohol problems was cited by 38% of all respondents, with the 18-24 age group particularly citing this as a reason. Another 28% of all respondents had personal experience of alcohol problems with someone other than a parent, with markedly 70% of those aged between 45-54 identifying with this reason.

Due to the size of the sample, too much shouldn't be read into the differences between age groups, but it is clear that many volunteers who have had experience of alcohol problems with parents or others are keen to help those in a similar situation. In fact 8 of the respondents felt able to provide further comments of their experiences relating to their own experience of alcohol-related issues.

Question 3 On average, how many hours a month have you volunteered?

This simple question is not as easy to respond to as it appears, as without specifying in detail what qualifies as volunteering (e.g. attending meetings, responding to queries on the helpline, and whether to include less formal activities), we left it up to the respondents to consider how best to answer this.

Q3 On average, how many hours a month have you volunteered? (percentages of total who responded)		
Up to 6 hours	7-12 hours	More than 12 hours
32%	46%	20%

Using the data from this question and Question 1 above (length of volunteering), those who have volunteered for 6 months or less on average claim to have volunteered marginally more hours than those who are more experienced volunteers. In fact 4 out of the 15 people who responded who volunteered for 6 months or less indicated they volunteered for more than 12 hours a month, which was matched by the group who had volunteered for more than 2 years (4 out of 15). Of those who volunteered more than 6 months but less than 12, none of the 7 respondents in this group volunteered for more than 12 hours a month, although 6 of them volunteered for 7-12 hours a month. Of the 13 respondents who had volunteered between 1 and 2 years, 2 have done more than 12 hours, while 6 of them, i.e. half, volunteered up to 6 hours.

It must be remembered that the questionnaire was most likely answered by those with a particularly strong commitment to Nacoa, and it is impressive that so many volunteers continue to provide so many hours. There might be a pattern to the above results, in that those who are relatively new volunteers commit more hours, and then settle down to a consistent pattern of volunteering that is more manageable for them. It might be that those who continue after a couple of years are those who can provide more volunteering hours so their contribution is relatively higher. However, as this data can only be based on a general impression by the respondents, it might be that some people underestimated or overestimated the number of hours they have put in. Finally, these figures should only be taken as an overview of their contribution to Nacoa, and take no account of the value of the contribution or the myriad ways in which volunteers contribute, often without them realising.

Question 4 Following the Nacoa foundation training programme, which of the following roles have you performed in the PAST (but no longer perform) or NOW?

This question enabled respondents to identify which roles they are currently performing, and if they are not currently performing the role, did they perform that role in the past. Respondents could indicate as many of the roles as they wished.

Q4 Following the Nacoa foundation training programme, which of the following roles have you performed in the PAST (but no longer perform) or NOW? (percentages of total in each category)						
	NOW			PAST		
	ALL	Male	Female	ALL	Male	Female
Helpline activities	40.0%	50.0%	36.8%	66.0%	66.7%	65.8%
Fundraising	28.0%	41.7%	23.7%	18.0%	25.0%	15.8%
Promoting the aims of Nacoa (formally or informally)	56.0%	66.7%	52.6%	40.0%	41.7%	39.5%
Trustee	2.0%	8.3%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
Speaker volunteer	8.0%	25.0%	2.6%	4.0%	0.0%	5.3%
Administrative/Technical Support	8.0%	16.7%	5.3%	12.0%	16.7%	10.5%
Helping at events, e.g. UPFEST	24.0%	33.3%	21.1%	22.0%	8.3%	26.3%
Research activities	18.0%	25.0%	15.8%	22.0%	25.0%	21.1%
Media support	6.0%	16.7%	2.6%	8.0%	8.3%	7.9%

There were five roles that appeared to be particularly popular amongst volunteers both currently (when they completed the questionnaire in the Spring of 2012) and in the past. These were: promoting the aims of Nacoa, helpline activities, fundraising, helping at events, and research activities. There were some differences between males and females in the roles they perform, with males currently more represented in the roles of speaker volunteer and media support.

Promoting the aims of Nacoa is the role that the majority of respondents indicated they currently perform. This is a broad description of a number of activities that could be undertaken on behalf of Nacoa, but from the figures 92% of respondents either now or in the past believe they have contributed to Nacoa in this way. The evidence suggests that Nacoa volunteers see promoting the aims of Nacoa as being extremely important as a volunteer.

Helpline activities had been the role that most people performed in the past but now no longer perform, while 50% of men still undertake that role currently. Females in the past were more active in helpline activities, but this is currently less than it was, with females now concentrating more on promoting Nacoa aims. However, the drop in the apparent popularity of the role might be more to do with volunteers spending less time on the helpline.

Question 5 How helpful was the Nacoa foundation training programme, both to your role as a volunteer and in your activities outside of Nacoa?

This question was designed to provide some information on the impact of the Nacoa Foundation Training Programme on the respondents, not just in helping them fulfil their role as a volunteer, but beyond that in their other activities.

Q5 How helpful was the Nacoa foundation training programme, both to your role as a volunteer and in your activities outside of Nacoa? (5 most helpful) <i>(Mean result, also expressed as a percentage)</i>	As a Nacoa Volunteer	4.6 (92%)
	Outside of Nacoa	4.2 (84%)

Volunteers were asked to score how helpful they found the foundation training on a scale of 1 to 5, with 5 being the most helpful. They scored both questions very highly at 92% (4.6/5 was the average score) as a Nacoa volunteer, and 84% (4.2/5) for their activities outside of Nacoa. Notably only one person scored 2 for the training helping their role as a volunteer (none was lower), while 33 scored it as 5 (so 66% of respondents gave it the top score). For the training helping outside Nacoa, again only one person (a different person to the one above) scored it 2 (none was lower), while 23 scored it 5 (in fact half of those who actually provided a score).

Volunteers have consistently praised the foundation training programme but this is the first time research has provided a quantitative measure for the training from volunteers across cohorts and time.

Question 6 How well do these aspects of the Nacoa organisational structure support you as a volunteer?

This question simply asked which of the main types of support provided by Nacoa helped their volunteer contribution.

Q6 How well do these aspects of the Nacoa organisational structure support you as a volunteer? (5 most supportive) <i>(Mean result, also expressed as a percentage)</i>	Volunteer meetings	4.1 (82%)
	Helpline supervisor	4.3 (86%)
	Nacoa policies and procedures	4.3 (86%)
	Ongoing training	4.0 (80%)
	Open-door policy to all staff	4.3 (86%)

Volunteers scored the organisational support highly for all aspects, with particularly high scores for the open door policy to all staff, the Nacoa policies and procedures, and helpline supervisor (86% each). The top scores of 4 or 5 were given by two thirds of the respondents for each of the aspects listed, with the score of 2 being given on average twice for each of the aspects. The open door policy received more scores of 5 than the others, with 28 out of the 45 respondents who answered this part of the question. This would indicate that the organisational structure of Nacoa is well regarded by the volunteers and complements well the foundation training programme.

Question 7 How important are Nacoa social activities to your volunteer experience?

Nacoa provides a range of social activities for the volunteers, and this was an opportunity to gauge how well these were regarded.

Q7 How important are Nacoa social activities (eg Quiz nights, Awards Evening etc) to your volunteer experience? (5 most important) <i>(Mean result, also expressed as a percentage)</i>	3.7 (74%)
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The overall score of 3.7 (74%) would probably rate as particularly high for any type of social activity aimed at such a broad spectrum of people who make up the volunteers responding to this survey. In fact 29 of the 48 people who responded to this question rated it 4 or 5, although one rated it 1. What this does suggest is that there is no part of the Nacoa community of volunteers that seem to be disenfranchised by the Nacoa social activities.

Question 8 Which have been your most favourite and least favourite aspects of volunteering?

This is a particularly valuable question in helping to understand how respondents relate to the various activities and features of working as a volunteer in Nacoa. For this question we also provided a comment box for respondents to provide more detail if they desired.

Q8 Which have been your most favourite and least favourite aspects of volunteering? <i>(percentages of total in each category)</i>						
	Most Favourite			Least Favourite		
	ALL	Male	Female	ALL	Male	Female
Working on the Helpline (generally)	82.0%	75.0%	86.8%	4.0%	8.3%	2.6%
Answering phone calls on the Helpline	82.0%	75.0%	84.2%	8.0%	8.3%	7.9%
Composing emails for the Helpline	64.0%	66.7%	63.2%	8.0%	16.7%	5.3%
Data Entry for the Helpline	20.0%	25.0%	18.4%	34.0%	33.3%	36.8%
Compiling information packs	34.0%	33.3%	34.2%	24.0%	33.3%	21.1%
Public speaking on behalf of Nacoa	12.0%	25.0%	7.9%	8.0%	8.3%	7.9%
Fundraising events	26.0%	41.7%	21.1%	8.0%	8.3%	7.9%
Development opportunities (eg occupational, personal)	48.0%	50.0%	47.4%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
Meeting others committed to the same cause	70.0%	58.3%	73.7%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
Being part of a volunteer-focused organisation	76.0%	66.7%	78.9%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%

The top four favourite aspects of volunteering were: answering calls on the helpline, working on the helpline generally, being part of a volunteer-focused organisation, and meeting others committed to the same cause. The two least favourite aspects of volunteering were both administrative activities: data entry work and compiling information packs, although it is worth noting that a significant group of volunteers do enjoy both these activities.

From the comments relating to this question, no consistent theme emerges, but one person did say that *"It has been good to join a group that is so welcoming and supportive to volunteers"*, while

another indicated that they did not enjoy the experience as much when volunteering levels were low. One volunteer said:

“I have volunteered for five other organisations/charities and out of these only the Red Cross and Nacoa have had a consistent well thought-out, relevant, interesting and comprehensive training programme as well as regular meetings offering support. I was very impressed with the training that Nacoa provided especially the talks/presentations of people's life experiences, other organisations etc. Least favourite would probably be times when there were no calls at all.”

Question 9 If you have been unable to volunteer as much as you would like, is this due to any of the following factors?

This was an opportunity to quantify some of the factors that affect volunteers' ability to provide their time to Nacoa. Broad categories were chosen that covered the likely spectrum of factors, but respondents could provide more detailed information in the comment box provided.

Q9 If you have been unable to volunteer as much as you would like, is this due to any of the following factors? (percentages of total in each category)								
	ALL	M	F	18-24	25-34	35-44	45-54	65-74
Work commitments	54.0%	66.7%	50.0%	75%	44.4%	55.6%	50.0%	0.0%
Family/social commitments	36.0%	33.3%	36.8%	33.3%	22.2%	55.6%	50.0%	0.0%
Health	18.0%	16.7%	18.4%	8.3%	22.2%	0.0%	40.0%	0.0%
Time	36.0%	58.3%	28.9%	50.0%	38.9%	22.2%	30.0%	0.0%
Other volunteer commitments	8.0%	8.3%	7.9%	8.3%	5.6%	0.0%	20.0%	0.0%
Distance	30.0%	33.3%	28.9%	16.7%	50.0%	33.3%	10.0%	0.0%
Other	16.0%	25.0%	13.2%	25.0%	16.7%	11.1%	10.0%	0.0%

When volunteers were asked about the factors that prevented them from volunteering, work commitments was the reason cited by 54%, followed by family/social commitments and time at 36% each, with distance scoring 30%. This very much reflects the current research on volunteering and is not particular to Nacoa. It is interesting to note that younger volunteers (18–24 yrs) cited work commitments (75%) and time (50%) more frequently than other age groups.

A number of respondents provided personal details relating to why they no longer volunteered for Nacoa as much, or had stopped entirely. A small number of respondents had moved away from the Bristol area and therefore could no longer contribute to the helpline or other office-related activities. A few others cited health or emotional reasons, indicating that their involvement with Nacoa and their personal circumstances took a particular toll on them. Three of the respondents did indicate that working on the helpline meant they came into contact with a small number of very frequent repeat callers, and they felt that this was particularly difficult to deal with.

Question 10 Are there any changes you would suggest to improve volunteering at Nacoa?

This was an open question, asking for any comments relating to potential improvements to volunteering at Nacoa. As one can imagine, there were a number of helpful suggestions, and these will be considered by the management team to see if they are practical (some have already been implemented independent of this research). Some people commented that as they had not been involved for a while their suggestions might already have been implemented. A number of the ideas related to the website design (the website has been recently re-launched), IT systems (these have recently been updated), email protocols, mentoring and supervision, and repeat callers. A small number also felt that the commitment of other volunteers was not as great as it could be, and that there should be a stronger requirement for volunteers to undertake a certain number of hours.

Question 11 If you have any specific examples of how volunteering at Nacoa has had a significant impact on your life or those around you, please describe.

As one would expect, the comments here are very personal, and clearly no single individual's experience is the same as another. Nonetheless, again a number of themes emerge. Firstly, the volunteers' understanding of alcoholism and its impact in the family has been substantially deepened, to such an extent that it has helped in many aspects of volunteers' lives, including their personal careers and their work with other social agencies. Secondly, the training and the understanding it has engendered has helped the volunteers to come to terms with their own or family history relating to alcoholism. And thirdly, the experience of volunteering for Nacoa has helped them in choosing their career path, so that they have chosen to work in professions aimed at helping people deal with their issues (not just in alcoholism). In other words, volunteering at Nacoa has been both eye-opening and therapeutic, and not a single respondent had a negative view to put forward.

Do you have any other comments relating to the questions asked in this questionnaire?

Finally we provided respondents with the opportunity to make any further comments. A couple of people thought the actual research was a good idea in terms of providing them with an opportunity to feedback their views. Others felt it was a shame that they could no longer provide support, for example:

"The best thing about being a Nacoa volunteer is being part of such a great team - the pastoral support was excellent when I volunteered. My only suggestion for improvement would be to find more ways to harness the skills of volunteers, such as myself, who now live away from Bristol and cannot be helpline volunteers."

Section 3 Interview Results and Analysis

The interviews were conducted face to face and over the phone with 12 volunteers, these being selected as a representative sample of those who had responded to the questionnaire. As they had already responded to the questionnaire, a number of the comments below echo those made in the previous section above. Recording of the interviews was not verbatim, but the notes highlight the main discussion points and views expressed during the interviews. The interview schedule (see Appendix B) served to stimulate the discussion with the volunteers, but we have ordered the results differently to better encapsulate the issues and themes that were discussed. While the main focus of the research, and the first main thread of the discussions, was the volunteers' experience of the Foundation Training Programme, inevitably other aspects of their work with Nacoa was discussed. The second area of discussion that can be identified related to Nacoa as an organisation. Finally, and threaded throughout the interviews, was the volunteers' experience of volunteering at Nacoa and their particular relationship with it.

The Foundation Training Programme

"I thought you might also want to know about how useful I've found the skills which Nacoa teaches as part of its helpline training in my life outside Nacoa, which was something I never thought about at the time when I signed up as a volunteer."

"The point that stays with me most clearly was the training around family dynamics and how alcoholism ploughs an ugly red line through the whole family potentially for generations to come. . . .I could see how Nacoa, by offering a friendly and informed voice on the end of the phone, can help people free themselves from the power of that red line. That's life-changing stuff and I was grateful to be given the opportunity to be a part of Nacoa and help others but more than that, Nacoa changed me too."

[Source of quotes: Nacoa Records]

Overall experience

It is clear from the results of the questionnaire (in the previous section) that the Nacoa Foundation Training is highly regarded by volunteers. Each interview started by asking for a summary of the interviewee's experience of the Foundation Training Programme. All interviewees described the training as a positive experience. When interviewees were asked if any particular part of the training stood out for them, the family systems session was the most cited, followed by the neurochemistry session. The family systems session in particular was described by a number of interviewees as being dramatic and leaving a strong impression on them. A number of interviewees had experienced volunteer training at other charities/organisations so were able to compare their experience of training. As such, the Nacoa training was very highly regarded.

Recruitment and motivation

Volunteers were mainly recruited into Nacoa in one of three ways: through the individual searching for a voluntary service via the Nacoa website, the Bristol Volunteer Centre, or through their University Volunteering Service.

When volunteers did discuss motivations for volunteering these were mainly in general terms: to help children, to contribute to society, to develop their skills, and to donate their time to a good cause. None of the interviewees mentioned whether they would use Nacoa as a reference for a course or position. Three interviewees in particular noted that 'people who do the training for their CV do not last'.

Induction

The interviewees appreciated the mentoring system which provides new volunteers with additional support during their initial months. However, they did indicate that the effectiveness of the mentoring provided depended on a variety of factors. They were aware of the practical issues of mentors being able to cover specific shifts, and that their ability to introduce the new volunteer to different activities was affected by the frequency and timing of those activities (e.g. being able to deal with particular types of enquiry on the helpline). While the informal system suited most interviewees, one interviewee felt that they would have preferred a more formal system with a clearer mentor role and more formalised training at this point.

CRB checks have been cited as alienating volunteers but this was not the case at Nacoa where the whole process is mediated by the training team, and applications are submitted to allow processing time so that volunteers can start on the Helpline in time. (The Criminal Records Bureau was merged with the Independent Safeguarding Authority in December 2012 to form the Disclosure and Barring Service [DBS].)

Training as an ongoing process

While the training was highly regarded there was also recognition that learning at Nacoa is an ongoing process. Interviewees acknowledged that they are always learning and developing their skills, both formally and informally. 'There are no right answers' is almost a mantra at Nacoa, so volunteers are aware that nobody is expected to be the perfect person with a definitive response. This recognition means that volunteers are open to sharing their experiences and learning from each other in a supportive environment.

Three interviewees felt strongly that the training should be seen as 'the first step' of volunteer development. They felt that volunteers should expect to develop over time with experience, and take opportunities to learn new skills.

Impact of the training

The impact of the Foundation Training Programme on the interviewees was significant. All twelve interviewees said that the training had been important to them. Four said that it had an impact on their working lives, leading to a specific job or career trajectory. Six interviewees said that the training was life changing or very significant, and three actually used the word 'therapeutic'.

Interviewees recognised that the training was crucial for their volunteer role and in preparing them to engage with the activities of Nacoa. In addition they felt that they had gained important insights to their own life and circumstances by engaging with the training. Having a broader perspective and being less judgemental were the main themes, and these were seen as traits that were important for their role at Nacoa but also went beyond this into their personal life.

Volunteers not progressing beyond training

A small number of volunteers drop out during the training process or during the induction. It was recognised by the interviewees that volunteers who do part of the training, or complete the training but then do not undertake volunteer sessions, are still likely to contribute to the aims of Nacoa. They have had the informative, educational, and experiential benefit of the training, so may share this knowledge with their community or society as a whole, either formally or informally. It was even suggested that a training programme could be fashioned for those who do not wish to actually volunteer for the helpline or other structured activities, but who might more generally promote the aims of Nacoa.

Suggestions for developing the training

Some suggestions were made by the interviewees about the development of the Foundation Training Programme. These were usually focused on listening to simulated calls, having more role-play activities, and more advice about the logistics of answering calls – e.g. typical starts and finish to calls.

Two interviewees had additional suggestions relating to training and development overall. One suggested having more frequent ongoing training sessions, and the other suggested an annual informal appraisal.

Organising volunteers

“It is really important to say something about the energy of Nacoa, and the staff and volunteers that run the helpline. As well as the excellent training, skills and resources that are made available at Nacoa, there is also a wonderful energy from staff and volunteers, which really brings all of the work to life.”

“NACOA has a wonderful buzz, its inclusivity, respect and passion for such a very genuine and needy cause is infectious. Even just popping into the office is enriching. I’m really pleased to be a part of NACOA.”

[Source of quotes: Nacoa Records]

The organisational ethos of Nacoa

A number of interviewees commented on how Nacoa does not feel like a formal organisation, but actually feels like a team, and that this provides great strength to it. Because volunteers feel valued at Nacoa, the Nacoa identity is regarded in a holistic way so volunteers see themselves as part of Nacoa as well as contributors to the organisation. The advantage of this is that all activities are regarded as equally important to the organisation’s mission.

The dynamic and open nature of the organisation was frequently discussed, along with the reasons for this. Some volunteers attributed this to the nature of the work and the commitment of Nacoa volunteers to a shared cause. All interviewees said that they felt welcomed and could talk with other volunteers, the CEO, Volunteering Manager and Helpline Supervisor, so there was open access throughout the organisation. However, two interviewees suggested that the administration office could be intimidating to new volunteers and that they had felt excluded from the area at times. Other volunteers had not felt this, although three did mention that the administration office could be busy.

The ‘added value’ of working with other volunteers was noted by many interviewees. Of the twelve interviewees, only two said that they preferred to work alone, five preferred to work with others, and the remaining five had no preference. It seems that the volunteer experience is often enhanced by sharing the company, experience and expertise of others.

Interviewees consistently referred to Nacoa as both a supportive and a supporting organisation. They described many instances of the organisation assisting them through significant life events, such as starting a new job, moving, health problems, bereavements etc. Their experience of Nacoa is of an organisation that is responsive to its volunteers and is keen to support them as individuals.

Organisational policies and procedures

The purpose of Nacoa is to provide support to children of alcoholics (COAs) and everyone affected by a parent’s drinking, and to achieve this it is essential to establish policies and procedures. The Nacoa policies and procedures are regarded by the interviewees as extremely helpful in providing guidance.

Some interviewees were able to recall various details from these but most remarked that they were happy to look at them when necessary. A number of the interviewees who had completed their training while being students said that they felt the policies and procedures sessions had better prepared them for the world of paid work.

Several interviewees made the point that Nacoa's reach was very wide, and that volunteers were actively encouraged to suggest new systems or schemes to raise awareness of the charity or raise funds. They recognised that while limited resources may mean that volunteer suggestions cannot be actioned immediately, it did not mean that suggestions were ignored. Instead their contribution was clearly noted and acknowledged, with the real possibility of being implemented at another time.

Formal versus informal systems of work

Nacoa as an organisation consistently states that it is for individual volunteers to decide what activities they do to support the organisation. Interviewees all understood that they could work on the helpline in a variety of ways, including responding to phone calls or emails, and contributing to the administrative or other organisational activities. The majority of interviewees said that they preferred the current informal system of supervision rather than a more formalised system. However, three interviewees suggested that they would prefer a more formalised system to the current one, although one felt this might be difficult to implement practically.

The most striking theme that emerges from the interviews was of Nacoa as an organisational team working towards a shared goal. At Nacoa volunteers appreciated being treated as part of the professional team and enjoyed the informality of the organisation. Volunteers are regarded on equal terms as paid staff, and the few paid staff that there are also contribute some of their time on a voluntary unpaid basis. Volunteers are given the opportunity to choose how they contribute to the organisation and all contributions are acknowledged. Volunteers are thanked for their time both formally, with an annual awards ceremony and service certificates, and informally. Both were noted by volunteers and appreciated. A number of volunteers who had volunteered elsewhere commented that the atmosphere at Nacoa was uniquely open, encouraging and supportive.

Nacoa communications

Communications between Nacoa and volunteers were seen as effective and efficient. Interviewees were well aware of the activities of Nacoa and future events. Annual events such as COA week or UPFEST were well signposted, and this allowed volunteers to have good notice of the plans for the events, and they could therefore best decide how they could contribute to them if they choose to do so.

However, two interviewees identified one aspect of communications that they thought could be improved. While volunteers were able to contact the Volunteering Manager and Helpline Supervisor via the phone or by email, the email link was a generic rather than a specific one. There was not a

dedicated address in the case of a volunteer who wanted to directly contact the Volunteering Manager or Helpline Supervisor in confidence. They were concerned that emails might be 'lost' in the system and that volunteer emails could go awry.

Volunteer meetings

Meetings are held monthly to provide volunteers with an opportunity to discuss any issues that have arisen as a result of their volunteering. It is a chance to catch up, share experiences, and discuss future plans and organisational issues. Interviewees in paid employment often found it difficult to attend but recognised that it was useful to have the meetings. Interviewees who had been involved with Nacoa for a number of years commented that what they gained from the meetings changed over time, and they welcomed the regular opportunity to discuss issues.

The experience of volunteering at Nacoa

"My overwhelming memory of NACOA was of an amazing group of very disparate group of volunteers all of whom gave as much time as they could to help the children of alcoholics. The amazing thing was that even though we were all very different and from very different backgrounds that we all became friends and that it was a perfect team united to help these children."

"From the time I expressed an interest in joining I have felt encouraged, nurtured and valued. Volunteers are treated with the same respect and understanding that we are proud to be able to show to those who call or e-mail the helpline in need of support."

[Source of quotes: Nacoa Records]

Volunteer retention

Interviewees felt proud to be associated with Nacoa and volunteers were keen to maintain their involvement with the organisation. Of the 12 volunteers in the interview sample, 6 were currently active as volunteers working on a variety of tasks, including on the helpline, as a speaker, trustee, or champion. Of the remaining 6 interviewees, 2 had taken a break from volunteering due to a change in family or work circumstances, although both hoped to return as a volunteer in the future. The remaining 4 interviewees had moved from the area and were not currently volunteering. However, 3 out of these 4 did make the point that they still regarded themselves as very much part of Nacoa and they continued to 'spread the word' by raising awareness both formally and/or informally in their current environments.

A small number of volunteers discussed 'taking a break' from volunteering at particular points when their personal, family or work commitments became overwhelming. Volunteers rarely resigned or retired from their volunteer role formally, and indeed only three of our sample actually described letting the organisation know that they were leaving or taking a break. Nacoa volunteers feel very

connected to the organisation and are not keen to relinquish this contact. Volunteers who had moved away did say that they appreciated being able to keep in contact with Nacoa via the website, email or social media.

The overall issue of volunteer retention was discussed by 7 of the 12 interviewees. While no clear dominant reason was suggested, interviewees considered a variety of factors leading to volunteers leaving. Reasons relating to specific personal circumstances were cited, e.g. how difficult it might be to organise one's time, the demands of family, work or study, or the distance to the Nacoa office. Other reasons that were discussed considered the nature of the work, particularly on the helpline. The specific issue with repeat callers again was raised, with one interviewee stating that they stopped volunteering on the helpline for this reason. Two interviewees suggested that the reality of working on the helpline, particularly periods of intense activity punctuated by quiet sessions, was different to what some volunteers had anticipated, and that this 'mismatch' might contribute to the rate of attrition.

A couple of interviewees suggested that Nacoa might consider introducing more formalised volunteer contracts or agreements to reduce the number of volunteers leaving. However, the majority felt that this could be counterproductive. Three interviewees specifically regarded attrition as a part of the selection process, and felt that it is better to lose reluctant volunteers rather than they continue to participate, particularly given the context of Nacoa's aims to provide a service to vulnerable groups. Interviewees did not suggest that the attrition issue could be resolved entirely, as multiple factors can have an effect and individuals cannot predict how they might feel working at Nacoa.

Volunteering for Nacoa as an organisation

While the majority of volunteers who complete the training do become helpline counsellors, researchers, or speakers, they did not see that purely as their role. The training is multi-faceted, and volunteers valued the fact that they were regarded by themselves and the staff as working for the organisation as a whole. Some volunteers did speculate about this and various reasons were suggested. One pertinent theme was that because everyone at Nacoa does contribute by volunteering some of their time without financial recompense (the few paid staff members at Nacoa also contribute significant volunteering time to the organisation), everyone's role is appreciated and respected. There is a strong shared mission so everyone's contribution is valued. Answering the helpline, responding to emails, doing research or administration, and making the tea, are all regarded as worthwhile tasks.

In addition to the general helpline activities, three interviewees spoke of contributing to the organisation in other ways, e.g. by arranging sponsored events or disseminating Nacoa information. It is interesting to note that while volunteers were aware and supportive of fundraising activities, they were generally more engaged by promoting Nacoa and its aims.

Personal stories

In the face to face interviews, volunteers were asked how being a volunteer at Nacoa had contributed to their identity. Not surprisingly, interviewees usually pointed out that identity was complex, fluid and changing and cannot be discussed in simple terms. Nonetheless, more than half the interviewees felt that their role and experiences as a volunteer at Nacoa often coincided with or led to other significant changes in their personal and/or professional life. The impact of being a part of Nacoa was regarded as an important contribution to the identity of an individual and often was the catalyst for other changes. As mentioned above, four interviewees said that they revised their career plans following volunteering at Nacoa.

Although the interview schedule did not explicitly ask volunteers about their own experience of alcohol problems, this was addressed by a number of interviewees. These interviewees spoke movingly about their own experiences and how these had informed their motivation to contribute to the important work of Nacoa. It is not our intention to discuss these individual experiences but to recognise that a significant proportion of volunteers at Nacoa (over 60% from the questionnaire data) have had their own experiences with alcohol-dependent parents or others and wish to help those who are going through similar issues. It was humbling to listen to these stories and it is important that we do recognise that volunteers at Nacoa have been through their own journey.

Summary

The people interviewed all have very personal reasons and stories of how they came to join Nacoa as volunteers. The interviewees revealed that Nacoa has had a significant impact on their lives in a number of ways. Nacoa is very much perceived as a supporting environment. While the focus of the organisation is on providing support to COAs, volunteers also appreciated how much Nacoa supported them, not just as volunteers, but as individuals, especially when they were going through difficult life changes.

The Foundation Training Programme was valued not only for its contribution to their role as Nacoa volunteers, but also in the other aspects of their lives. Some perceived the training as life changing, and there were suggestions for extending the training to support other groups. No clear solution was suggested to improve the volunteer attrition rate, but it was recognised that at some points volunteers might need to take a break. Nonetheless, however much they contribute, even when taking a break, volunteers regarded themselves as very much part of Nacoa.

The interviewees recognised that Nacoa has a special quality about it, which is derived partly from the staff, but also from the volunteers themselves. They saw Nacoa as a vibrant organisation, achieving its objectives in imaginative ways, and they liked how the organisation is structured in a relatively informal way. They felt that they were in a more flexible environment, where their contribution to Nacoa was appreciated and encouraged to take a number of forms.

Each person's experience of Nacoa is clearly unique to them, but perhaps the unifying theme that emerges is that of the volunteers feeling that they have joined a community of people who share common goals. The process of helping others has also helped the volunteers with either their own personal lives, or with others close to them.

Section 4 Volunteering: a Further Perspective

There are particular issues raised above relating to the training of volunteers which might be further illuminated by looking at the research undertaken by a number of policy organisations and academic bodies. There are five areas of research and discussion which can provide further perspective. Firstly, there is the role of volunteering in society in general. Secondly, there is research relating to the specific motives of volunteers. Thirdly, there is research conducted in relation to volunteer training. Fourthly, there is the issue of volunteer turnover and attrition. Finally, there is the issue of repeat callers.

Volunteering as a social movement

Any overview of volunteer training should take into account the role of volunteering in society. Perhaps the broadest perspective we can find is provided by the United Nations (UN) view of the role of volunteering. Ten years after the Year of the Volunteer in 2001, the UN published the *State of the World's Volunteerism Report* (2011). The report looks at the changes in volunteering and emphasises its importance to world development. While this report does not look specifically at the training of volunteers it does look at volunteering from an interesting and unique perspective.

A number of themes are discussed in the report including: the importance of the contribution of volunteers to their communities and to the wider population; how volunteers contribute to world development, both explicitly and implicitly; the importance of wellbeing for the individual, community and world development; and how volunteering plays a role in overcoming barriers, increases the resilience of societies and reduces conflict.

The UN report notes that volunteering provides an important opportunity for people to use their knowledge, skills and social network for the benefit of their communities and themselves. It goes on to stress that:

"In a world experiencing unprecedented change, volunteerism is a constant. Even if its forms of expression are evolving, the central values of solidarity and feelings of connectedness with others remain as firm as ever and are universal. People are driven not only by their passions and self-interest but also by their values, their norms and their belief systems." (p94)

The report recognises that volunteerism is a very old tradition that is constantly evolving. This is reflected at the national level by the publication of the *Manifesto for Change: report of The Commission on the Future of Volunteering* in 2008. The Commission was established in 2006 to develop a long-term vision of volunteering in England. It heard evidence from 1,190 people and

organisations, and examined the opportunities and challenges for volunteering over the next ten years.

In the *Manifesto for Change*, the Commission suggests that the government can best support volunteering by adopting a position of 'non-interference' and by resisting developing new initiatives. Instead it suggests that the government should provide additional support to promote volunteering in a variety of ways. The Commission makes six detailed recommendations:

- 1 Raising the profile of volunteering by having volunteering champions and enhancing volunteering promotional events.
- 2 Making volunteering open to all by establishing an Access to Volunteering Fund, removing obstacles to volunteering, and extending employer-supported volunteering.
- 3 Modernisation of volunteering by modernising the volunteering infrastructure and volunteer-involving organisations.
- 4 Reward and recognition for volunteers and volunteering by developing new mechanisms that are attuned to the diversity of factors that motivate volunteers.
- 5 Training for volunteers, volunteer managers, and other staff.
- 6 The contribution of Government to act as a facilitator by taking responsibility for volunteering, considering the role of regulators, and making a specific commitment to the Compact and Volunteering Code of Practice and monitoring their implementation.

This report highlights the importance attached to volunteering by the Commission, and it was clearly urging the government to take a more active role in facilitating volunteering. With the formation of the Coalition Government in 2010, and Prime Minister David Cameron's emphasis on the Big Society, volunteering appears to be recognised as an important part of society by the current government. How this is actually implemented in practice is another matter of course, and this report is not the place for that discussion.

How this relates to Nacoa

What is clear is that Nacoa, along with many other organisations, is recognised as being an important part of the social infrastructure. While it has a specific role in relation to its stated aims and objectives, it will be influenced, both positively and negatively, by the overall role of volunteering in society. So for example, if volunteering in general is seen as a career pathway which eventually enables people to move into other areas, in particular to the public sector, it is inevitable that Nacoa will have more people volunteering on this basis. It is not possible to predict with any certainty the role volunteering will have in any government plans, but any organisation that relies on volunteers has to monitor developments closely.

Why people volunteer

The above overview naturally leads on to a discussion of the reasons for people volunteering. People volunteer for a wide variety of reasons and these may change over time. There are many papers in this area, but the 2006 review *Making Sense of Volunteering* produced by Colin Rochester for the Commission on the Future of Volunteering, provides a clear and concise summary. Rochester discusses different conceptualisations of volunteering and describes three different but connected perspectives: volunteering as service, volunteering as activism, and volunteering as leisure. Separately, these do not adequately reflect the complexity of many volunteering motivations or experiences, which probably tend to combine more than one of these aspects.

The report also discusses the emergence of the 'New Volunteer'. Volunteering is changing from a 'classic' or traditional service model to a 'new' skills acquisition model. In this model individuals hope to use their volunteer role to develop skills and then move into a related vocation and/or paid employment. There must be a balance between investment in these individuals or groups, and the contribution that they provide. The move away from traditional to skills-focused volunteering has resulted in the formalisation of volunteering which has both benefits and drawbacks. It contributes to a more reciprocal relationship between the organisation and the volunteer, but it can also limit the scope of volunteering opportunities due to the resources required to 'supervise' activities.

These themes are further developed in the book *Volunteering and Society in the 21st Century* (Rochester, Ellis Paine, and Howlett, 2010). The authors summarise the key challenges for volunteering at this time as: the importance of being inclusive, the dangers of formalisation, and the need to change its image. The authors suggest that the narrative needs to evolve from the long-term formal volunteering model to a more flexible episodic one that allows people to give a specific amount of their time over a limited period.

Stephen Claxton-Oldfield and colleagues have been researching volunteer motivations for over a decade. They have focused on the motivations of a particular group of volunteers, those who volunteer in palliative care settings. They have developed a research tool that focuses on the motivations for volunteering in this group. While the volunteers in palliative care tend to be older than those at Nacoa there are some important similarities. These volunteers often choose to volunteer after personal experience of palliative care, through family or friends, and have to undertake training before they can offer their time to the organisation. This also reflects the volunteering route of a significant number of Nacoa volunteers.

Claxton-Oldfield, Jefferies, Fawcett, and Wasylikiw (2004) reviewed previous British and American studies and carried out further interviews to compile a list of 22 reasons for volunteering. They carried out a number of questionnaire surveys to generate motivational themes for volunteering using factor analysis as a model. More recently, they have developed these themes to produce 5 key motivations

for volunteering: altruism, civic responsibility, leisure, self-promotion, and personal gain (Claxton-Oldfield S., Claxton-Oldfield J., Paulovic, and Wasytkiw, 2012). Altruistic motives were the strongest reasons for choosing to volunteer, and personal gain motives were the least strong. Altruistic motives were also found to be a significant predictor of volunteers' length of service to the hospice.

How this relates to Nacoa

The motivation of volunteers is in many ways a very personal issue for each volunteer, and it would be inappropriate to judge any single individual's likely contribution to Nacoa based on their motivation. Claxton-Oldfield et al (2012) use of the terms *self-promotion* and *personal gain* above might better be described as self and skills development. We have seen in the results of the questionnaire and the interviews how the volunteers have come to Nacoa with different experiences and expectations. At the same time, their involvement with Nacoa has changed their own perspective, and this can contribute to their long-term commitment. In addition, personal circumstances change in sometimes unpredictable ways, foreshortening or lengthening volunteers' commitment. However, it is also possible to suggest that volunteers who become involved with Nacoa to support their long-term career prospects appear not to be involved for as long as those that have personal experience of alcohol-related issues or a strong commitment to the cause. Both these broad groups have factors which will limit or extend their involvement. In any case, the value of a single person's contribution can transcend their actual length of service, and one does not know when the volunteering experience might affect their future actions and benefit society as a whole.

Training volunteers and learning organisations

The training of volunteers is recognised as a vital factor in the development of organisations and has a positive impact on the retention of volunteers. Justin Davis Smith, head of Volunteering England since 2007 and Director for Volunteering and Development at the National Council of Voluntary Organisations (NCVO), has noted that, while the recognition of the work of volunteers is at an all-time high, there remains the ongoing issue of investment. Volunteers need investment of time, training and resources so that they can develop their skills and contribute effectively:

“There is something very special about the volunteering relationship that can't be bought and sold. But the hard truth is that volunteering has to be underpinned and supported by substantial investment if it is to flourish and survive. Investment in communications and recruitment, and training and management; investment in programme design, and in reward and recognition. Above all, investment in the creation of new and exciting opportunities which capture the imagination and sense of what's possible for potential volunteers.”
(Davis Smith, 2012).

Voluntary organisations are no different to other public or commercial bodies, in that they must recognise that the people who work in them are their most important resource. To utilise this resource most effectively, organisations need to adopt certain characteristics, and a helpful model to encompass these is the *learning organisation*.

The work of Peter Senge (*The Fifth Discipline*, 1990, 2006) provides a guide to the characteristics of a learning organisation. Senge suggests that a learning organisation exhibits five main characteristics: systems thinking, personal mastery, mental models, a shared vision, and team learning. From a systems perspective, all parts of an organisation, the people, structures and processes all work together. It is important to develop an open culture that promotes inquiry but does not impose a formal structure for learning and development. Learning organisations tend to have flat, decentralised organisational structures. The shared vision also means that there are long-term goals that are intrinsic to the organisation.

Senge suggests that the accumulation of individual learning constitutes team or shared learning. This enables individuals to grow more quickly, and the problem-solving capacity of the organisation is improved through better access to knowledge and expertise. Learning organisations have open structures that facilitate team learning, and team members create, acquire, disseminate and implement knowledge throughout the organisation.

In 1999, Senge and colleagues published *The Dance of Change* (Senge, Kleiner, Ross, Roth and Smith, 1999) looking at the obstacles that stop organisations developing into learning organisations. Not surprisingly time was identified as a key factor. It takes time for an organisation to be open and to encourage individual and collective development. The learning organisation requires a substantial amount of energy to develop and maintain its ethos; it is a work in progress, evolving over time. Dialogue between members of an organisation is important and requires effort, time and hard work. As there are significant resource implications, organisations cannot always sustain the energy required. It also requires a degree of openness and humility that most organisations cannot provide.

An environment has to be created where individuals can share learning without it being devalued or ignored. In this way people can benefit from their knowledge, individuals become empowered, and the organisation as a whole benefits. There can be a tension between the shared vision of an organisation and encouraging dialogue and debate. The organisation has to accept diversity within its structure.

Key individuals in the organisation have to devote time and energy to developing the organisational ethos of learning, openness and acceptance so that the culture of good practice can be continued. Learning organisations are characterised by total staff (i.e. paid and/or unpaid) involvement in a process of collaboration directed towards shared values or principles. This sense of positive team spirit is successfully summarised by Senge below:

“When you ask people about what it is like being part of a great team, what is most striking is the meaningfulness of the experience. People talk about being part of something larger than themselves, of being connected, of being generative. It becomes quite clear that, for many, their experiences as part of truly great teams stand out as singular periods of life lived to the fullest. Some spend the rest of their lives looking for ways to recapture that spirit.” (Senge 2006, p13)

How this relates to Nacoa

Nacoa training provides volunteers with tools for development. The Foundation Training Programme is very highly regarded and seen as having a significant impact on the volunteer both in their roles within Nacoa and outside of the organisation. While the main reason for the training is to enable volunteers to understand and contribute to the work of the organisation, volunteers recognise that the training is the start of a deeper process of learning and understanding. They develop new skills and these may contribute to their life or career choices. Volunteers often refer to being more open and less judgemental, and further developing these skills beyond their role at Nacoa. Volunteers readily suggest that this openness encourages them to develop their skills both within and beyond Nacoa itself.

Nacoa has developed its learning ethos over time and has a strong and committed *raison d’être*. One of Nacoa’s aims is to promote research into the particular problems faced by those who grow up with parental alcoholism (for a recent example of this, see Appendix C). Good practice contributes to the development of volunteers and the service provided to its users. This feeds into the organisation and creates a positive feedback loop of good practice. Of course, this is not to suggest that Nacoa is an organisation that aspires to be ‘perfect’, the very concept is counter to this model, or that it set out specifically to become a learning organisation. However, by adopting the behaviours and characteristics that it has, Nacoa is following a model that is most likely to assist it maintaining its success. Nacoa may have to meet the expectations of people who are familiar with the concepts of continuing professional development and mentoring. In the light of this, Nacoa will need to monitor how it delivers learning programmes.

Volunteer turnover and attrition

Time constraints have been discussed frequently (e.g. Rochester, 2006; The Commission on the Future of Volunteering, 2008,) with regard to volunteering. There is a 'natural attrition rate' of volunteers who leave due to changes in work, family or other circumstances. To promote increased volunteering, organisations are advised to become more flexible and to provide short sessions for volunteering.

A recent study by the University of Plymouth looked at the recruitment and retention of new volunteers with the Samaritans. Fifty four new volunteers were recruited, eight of these left before the end of their initial training, and another five left in the next few weeks. The attrition rate at three months post training was approximately 25% (Pahl, White & Carroll, 2010).

Pahl, White & Carroll (2010) noted that experienced and long-term volunteers consistently indicated very high levels of commitment to the organisation. However, this study did not look at whether those volunteers, who are extremely committed from the outset, continue volunteering with the organisation for many years, or whether organisational commitment grows over time.

Comparing the stayers and leavers at the beginning and end of training, they found that stayers were more motivated to help people in need, to learn about the organisation and learn new skills. On the other hand, leavers were more concerned about how volunteering would fit into their lifestyle and did not worry so much about taking calls. This was a small study but the results seem to indicate that leavers had different motivations to those of stayers, and were not as strongly committed to the organisation.

This research team also looked at the detrimental impact of providing too much choice to a group of potential student volunteers (Carroll, White & Pahl, 2011). They found that offering too many options for volunteering could actually inhibit commitment. It may be that the current growth rate of the voluntary sector could be problematic as:

“Not only may it be splitting the volunteer community thinly across even more organisations but it may also discourage others from volunteering altogether.”

How this relates to Nacoa

Nacoa is not alone in trying to maintain an optimum level of volunteer activity. The majority of charities share these concerns. As noted above in the previous section, the motivations for volunteering are complex and it would be difficult and also unhelpful, to attempt to screen volunteers based on their motivations at the beginning of the Foundation Training Programme. The main reasons that volunteers leave the organisation are related to commitments, time and, physical proximity. The fact that traditionally a significant number of Nacoa volunteers are drawn from the

student population may contribute further to the attrition rate as students are less connected to an area and more likely to move away.

In terms of volunteer turnover Nacoa loses a number of volunteers every year, but also recruits and trains new volunteers to maintain numbers at a relatively stable level. Valuable skills are lost that need rebuilding, but turnover also brings different perspectives which stimulate the organisation and encourages new initiatives.

Repeat callers

All helplines have regular or repeat callers. Some of these may be hoax or malicious calls, while other regular callers may require ongoing support and assistance. Helplines have to discuss these callers and develop their own protocols and systems to deal with the needs of vulnerable callers. Developing a caller template plan or strategy allows for continuity and a consistent response from all volunteers. This is a longstanding issue and is best summarised below by the Telephone Helplines Association:

“Helplines generally prefer to deal with these problems as quietly as possible, partly because they are frequently caused by vulnerable people. If the behaviour is widely publicised there is the risk of copycat behaviour, and also the sector as a whole feels that it is important that the public sees helplines as problem solvers who will preserve confidentiality at all costs. In reality the sector is hugely successful, and passionate about confidentiality. These particular problems are extremely rare, given the volume of calls made to helplines, but they need to be soluble.” Telephone Helplines Association (Wilby, 2003, p3)

How this relates to Nacoa

A number of volunteers noted that they, or other volunteers, could find ongoing callers challenging for a variety of reasons. Nacoa offers support in this area and reviews its practice and caller templates regularly. However, it might be that there is a mismatch between the expectations of volunteers and the reality of working on a helpline. It is most likely that people’s vision of a helpline is primarily formulated by seeing dramatised versions of emergency helplines. They see a number of volunteers working together, each in their own cubicle, taking calls from distressed individuals, and talking through their problems. The reality of course is very different, and having to deal with a few individuals who regularly phone, and may be challenging, is not the picture that they had anticipated. There is a danger that these people may be regarded as beyond the norm and therefore particularly problematic. In fact, these people are to be expected, and need to be assisted as much as anyone else, according to the guidelines set down and agreed by the organisation.

Summary

As can be seen above, some of the themes that have emerged from the questionnaire and interviews can be placed in a broader perspective. Nacoa has to operate within an environment where volunteering is becoming a central part of the social infrastructure, and as such there are certain expectations on it. In particular, the motivations of people volunteering for Nacoa now might well be different from the past. Everyone is motivated by a set of expectations determined by their own background and situation, but perhaps more than ever before, there are groups of people who see volunteering as a route to support their career. This is inevitable given the current economic situation, and is something that needs to be considered in the design and implementation of Nacoa policies and procedures.

In particular, the training and development of volunteers might well become a more formalised process in the future, as people expect it to become an integral part of their overall educational attainment. It also might be that Nacoa has to deal with different patterns of volunteer contribution, leading perhaps to shorter-term commitments provided by volunteers. This is already the case with students, who whatever their personal motivation for joining Nacoa, inevitably have many life choices ahead of them which militate against longer term commitment. Finally, the issue of repeat callers is something with which all those operating helplines have had to cope. This might become even more of a challenge if the growth in online social networking as a way of conducting our personal and professional relationships is found to alienate more people than they help.

Section 5 Findings and Suggestions

The research for this report was designed to provide information that could help inform the maintenance and development of the Foundation Training Programme. As the research evolved, inevitably other aspects of Nacoa were encompassed, and issues that emerged from the questionnaire were further reviewed during the interview process. In addition a broader perspective was added in the form of a review of some key reports. The result of all this is to provide an overall picture of volunteering at Nacoa, which while not exhaustive in detail, hopefully provides a flavour of how the volunteers perceive Nacoa, and what Nacoa might need to address to continue to support its volunteers. However one must always bear in mind that when talking about Nacoa, we are not talking about a large organisation, but one that is managed by a small core team of extremely hard working people acting in different roles (including staff, trustees, patrons, and speakers), and a large number of volunteers.

Reasons for volunteering

People have a variety of reasons for volunteering, although the one that was the most commonly cited in response to the questionnaire was to promote the wellbeing of children. Half of those who answered also cited gaining experience of counselling as a reason. While the first reason appears to be altruistic, the second appears to relate more to vocational and skills development. However, to categorise volunteers in this way would be wrong. As the previous sections above show, people have a complex mixture of reasons for volunteering, and these can often interact with each other. Those who appear to be volunteering for specific personal reasons might then find that their experience opens up career pathways that they had not previously considered. Those that seek experience mainly in order to help their career prospects may become long-term champions of the organisation, and can be important allies in the future.

Ultimately it would be ill-advised to prejudge people on their apparent motivations, and it is notable that Nacoa has never done this. In fact, Nacoa is perceived by the volunteers to be extremely open to all. The only note of caution is that as the voluntary sector overall is seen and promoted as a career route, there might well be additional pressure on Nacoa to fashion its activities, particularly learning and development programmes, to support this.

Training and development in Nacoa

The primary aim of the Foundation Training Programme is to educate volunteers around the issues of alcohol dependency and how this may affect the individual concerned and others, their family (in particular the children), and their friends. Volunteers will use this information directly when they provide support to those who contact the helpline. The volunteers recognised that the training was of high quality, and that it was just the start of the learning process. Some volunteers specifically praised the support that they received from Nacoa staff and peers, and commented that they felt that the training was life changing.

The training scored very highly in the questionnaire in terms of helping volunteers with their work in Nacoa and in helping their activities outside of Nacoa. Volunteers frequently made the link between their volunteer role and how this contributed to their personal and professional development. In some volunteering contexts it is suggested that this aspect of self-development should be emphasised to attract more volunteers but this issue is more complex when volunteers have direct contact with vulnerable groups.

The training and development process in Nacoa has clearly been very effective in equipping people to deal with the requirements faced by volunteers. It has evolved over time and will continue to change as new circumstances develop. However, as stated above, it could be that the future expectations on the role of training and development in volunteer organisations means that it might have to become more formalised in the future, as volunteering becomes a mainstream career route.

There were a number of suggestions that maybe the training could be extended beyond the role of volunteer, and that there are many more people who could benefit from the knowledge and experience of the organisation, e.g. other professionals in health and social care. This might be through a shorter course rather than the complete programme. Of course this would have resource implications that would need to be addressed. It might be that some other volunteers could take on aspects of this work.

Volunteer retention after training

While some volunteers continue to volunteer for a long period, others do so for a more limited period, and some do not actively volunteer after training. There was recognition that this might be due to some people realising that the roles undertaken in Nacoa might not be what they expected. In particular, there was concern that some people have an unrealistic expectation of the work on the helpline.

There have been suggestions that people should somehow be contractually tied to Nacoa, so that by undertaking the training they are committed to providing a certain amount of time to work within it over the following year. However, this type of volunteer contract has the potential to alienate rather than encourage people. While it might filter out some people who will not commit time in the future, it might well also filter out those who might commit more time than they anticipated. The training also acts as an education for those who might need it to help themselves and others outside of the activities of Nacoa. It is unlikely that any proscribed process will improve the number of people willing to commit more time to Nacoa. The most likely situation is that one needs a relatively large intake to provide a relatively small number of people committed to Nacoa, while those who do not commit may well benefit in many other ways and contribute more generally.

Regardless of the length of service, the training does seem to inform the day to day interactions of volunteers with others, i.e. friends, family and colleagues, so there is a wider effect. It is important that we recognise this 'wider effect'. Those who have undertaken the Nacoa training may well contribute to the aims of Nacoa beyond their volunteering activity. This can be extremely valuable, and in effect these volunteers can act as informal champions for Nacoa, and can provide extremely valuable long-term support. Nacoa could attempt to reach this group to ascertain how much they do to promote the aims of the organisation, but it is likely that this group would be difficult to contact and it may be resource intensive to do so. It is probably not possible to quantify or measure such activity, but the evidence suggests that it does contribute to the aims of Nacoa. We do know that volunteers who have been with Nacoa often continue to support and promote Nacoa after they have stopped actively volunteering, so it seems reasonable to speculate that volunteers who have not volunteered after their training may do the same.

The reality of any organisation that is largely operated by volunteers is that in the main volunteers do not have the same type of commitment to providing their time and energy as paid staff. They may have their own paid employment or education, or are no longer able to work, or have a multitude of reasons why they cannot commit their time. The usual pattern found in charities, associations, and clubs throughout the country is that there is a core group of people who put in a large amount of time, and there is a greater number of volunteers surrounding this group who put in varying amounts of time.

It might be that the recruitment process for volunteers could be changed, which might alter the initial pool of volunteers and promote retention. Currently the majority of Nacoa volunteers are recruited through the Nacoa website, the University Volunteering Services or the Bristol Volunteer Centre. In many ways Nacoa is at the forefront of 'new volunteer' methods of recruitment so it is difficult to suggest any further recruitment initiatives. However, it may be worth taking a step back to consider more 'traditional' routes for recruitment. Nacoa speakers or champions could mention volunteering at the end of their sessions, and volunteer opportunities could be included on Nacoa information literature.

Operational issues

With any research of this type, volunteers have used the opportunity to provide suggestions to deal with issues that they have noticed, and to improve the operation of the organisation.

Repeat callers

A small number of respondents noted that they found calls from repeat callers using the helpline difficult to deal with. There is no doubt that the nature of these calls can influence the experience of some people working on the helpline. It is an issue that has been discussed at Nacoa over a number of years. There are two aspects of this that might improve matters. Firstly, perhaps it should be further emphasised in the training that while these particular callers are in the minority but appear to demand an inordinate amount of attention, they are not problem cases, but as expected as having any other type of call. Volunteers are therefore asked to respond to all callers according to the policies and procedures laid out, and this is part of their role. Secondly, given that requirement, the core team should not underestimate the eroding effect this type of call can have on those not experienced, so it might be that relatively new volunteers should be reminded that there are a number of strategies that could be adopted. It is important to recognise that these callers are very much part of why Nacoa exists.

Communications

Nacoa has a well-developed communications network both internally and also for information sharing, support and fundraising. Volunteers felt well informed by the process and were aware of key Nacoa events and activities. However, one area that was raised as a possible issue was that of personal and private communications being sent to the generic email address for volunteering. It was felt that these could go astray and be 'lost in the system'. While only a few instances were reported, following the installation of the new IT system at the end of 2012, there are now personal email addresses for all staff so that volunteers can contact them specifically.

Nacoa as a community

Throughout the research process a number of volunteers have noted the unique character of Nacoa. They perceive it to be unlike other charities or voluntary organisations. It is not a single issue campaign, or a vehicle for raising money for research, as important as these are. Nacoa is seen as very much a community. As with any community, it comprises a mix of people with different backgrounds and requirements. People come and go at different times, and provide different levels of support to the community as a whole and to the individuals within it. The community consists of the core team, the volunteers, and the people who use the helpline. There is a common bond throughout of working to help children affected by their parents drinking and people concerned with their welfare.

Nacoa has a very organic and liberal structure. The core team has created an environment which allows volunteers to do what they feel comfortable doing, and as much as they can to help the organisation. The consequences of this though is that there is the possibility of a relatively small group of people doing most of the work, as there are no sanctions to ensure that others have to contribute more. Nacoa could choose to have a more structured approach to volunteer commitment, but this would require an entirely different model of volunteering than that which currently exists. Changing the ethos that underpins Nacoa could radically alter the relationship between the staff and the volunteers, and it could well lead to less volunteer involvement than there is now. For the most part, the results of the questionnaire and interviews suggest that the volunteers are content with how Nacoa operates, and feel that the training has equipped them for their work in Nacoa and outside. Indeed, it is hard to come to any other conclusion than there is an immense respect and fondness for Nacoa.

Final comments

Nacoa aims to support everyone affected by a parent's drinking and to inform professionals and others about the possible effects of alcohol on individuals, families and society. To achieve this, Nacoa has developed a people-focused model of volunteering that suits its objectives, which is to work closely to promote the needs of an extremely vulnerable group of individuals. This model of volunteering has its difficulties in terms of resources and commitment, but at the same time it has many advantages. Perhaps the foremost of these advantages is that in effect Nacoa has created a community which is greater than the active volunteers delivering its current operational activities. The people in this community, the staff, volunteers, and users, are bound together in a number of ways, e.g. through the helpline, but in the future more and more through social media.

Nacoa works hard to train and support its volunteers and this develops the individual volunteers and the organisation as a whole and contributes to achieving its aims. The research revealed many benefits that derive both directly and indirectly from the Foundation Training Programme. As a result of volunteering at Nacoa:

- Volunteers contribute to the work and development of Nacoa and are proud of this.
- Volunteers are brought together by a better and shared understanding of the issues around alcohol and how individuals and families deal with this.
- Volunteers develop capabilities and experience that improves their skill set and promotes their life chances.
- Volunteers increase their self-confidence, well-being and connection with others.
- Volunteers are keen to 'spread the word' about the work of Nacoa and continue to do this even when they have ceased to volunteer in a formal capacity.

There are however ongoing challenges for Nacoa to:

- Maintain the high quality of training and support for volunteers.
- Maintain the structure of the organisation at a time of economic change.
- Balance its current model of volunteering with the needs of the organisation.

This research demonstrates three important features that underpin Nacoa's volunteering model. Firstly, that volunteering is personal and should be considered from the perspective of the individual taking part. People need to feel that their participation matters. Secondly, that participation should be encouraged and supported. Thirdly, significant barriers to participation are to be acknowledged, for example, time, other commitments and economic constraints.

The reality of coordinating volunteers is a challenging one and it is important that we appreciate how much resource is necessary to develop volunteers and support them. Volunteers do not provide a cheap workforce, they offer their time and skills, but there is a cost. Volunteers are encouraged to volunteer in the way that they choose to, but this can lead to disparities between volunteers' chosen activities and those that are the priority of the organisation. It is important that diversity is recognised but also important for the organisation to maintain its central focus.

At the current time there appears to be an equilibrium in the organisation, where the different requirements of staff, volunteers, and other stakeholders are combined in such a way as to produce an extremely effective body which exists on extremely limited funds, but has the support of a large number of people, and the gratitude of countless more. As such it is not difficult to conclude that Nacoa is indeed impressive for its size, and a model of good practice. This is supported by the awards it has received and the feedback from Nacoa volunteers and users of the helpline.

Currently this particular model of volunteering works for Nacoa. While some people might suggest a different approach, Nacoa should be wary of changing its organisation too much and too fast. Even small changes could upset this balance. Therefore any changes should be evolutionary and incremental. This is precisely how Nacoa has developed throughout its history, and we would suggest that this should be the way forward now.

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Appendix A Questionnaire

Nacoa Volunteer Questionnaire

Volunteer Training and its Contribution to the Aims of Nacoa

What will this research achieve?

Nacoa is a charity committed to supporting children of alcoholics (COAs) and informing professionals and others about the possible effects of alcohol on individuals, families and society. To achieve this, Nacoa depends on its volunteers who give up their time and energy to help in a multitude of ways. These include fundraising and working on the helpline, but they also help by promoting Nacoa's aims through volunteers' own professional and social networks.

Nacoa asks that helpline volunteers commit to 3 hours a week once they have completed the foundation training programme. Some volunteers continue to do so for a substantial period, while others do so for a more limited time. We are not suggesting that volunteers who work within Nacoa for a limited time are any less committed to Nacoa's aims, just that they may demonstrate their commitment in other ways.

The first commitment that volunteers make to Nacoa is to undertake the foundation training programme. The primary aim of the training is to educate volunteers about alcohol addiction, focusing on the effects on the family (in particular the children). Volunteers use this information directly when they provide support to helpline callers. In addition, the training informs the day to day interactions of volunteers with other people in the wider community. By undertaking the Nacoa training, volunteers contribute to promoting the aims of Nacoa and educating the community on issues relating to alcohol.

This research will assess the value of the initial Nacoa training to volunteers and help us to further develop this. It is important to ask volunteers who have been through the process about their experience of the training, and how it prepared them for volunteering. By doing so we may be able to better facilitate volunteer engagement and development.

What does this research involve?

The first phase of this research will involve a questionnaire being sent out to all Nacoa volunteers who have undertaken the Nacoa foundation training programme between 2003 – 2011, regardless of their level of involvement subsequent to the training. This survey will take place in the spring of 2012. The second phase of the research will involve conducting a small number of in depth interviews which will be selected to cover a variety of volunteer experiences and situations (including those who are currently active and those who are no longer active, working on the helpline or elsewhere).

Is taking part in this research voluntary and confidential?

Everything said to us will be treated in the strictest confidence and in accordance with the Data Protection Act. No names or other personally identifying information will be used and any examples or quotes used will remain anonymous.

Who is doing this research?

The research is being carried out for Nacoa by Anne-Marie Barron, a Nacoa volunteer and an experienced researcher. She will do the research and analysis under the guidance of Cassie Ohlson, the Nacoa Volunteering Manager. The research will be undertaken in accordance with Nacoa policies, protocol and procedures. Anyone who wishes to discuss the work can contact Cassie (by phone on 0117 924 8005 or by email volunteering@nacoa.org.uk).

Thank you for your assistance with this research and thank you for your contribution, past, present and future, to Nacoa; it is much appreciated.

Personal Details

What is your current age?

- 18-24
- 25-34
- 35-44
- 45-54
- 55-64
- 65-74
- 75 and above

What sex are you?

- Male
- Female

Were you a student in further/higher education when you undertook the Nacoa foundation training programme?

- Yes
- No

General Questions

Question 1

For how long have you volunteered for Nacoa? (*select one only*)

- 6 months or less
- 7 - 12 months
- 13 – 24 months
- More than 24 months

Question 2

Why did you get involved in volunteering at Nacoa? (*select as many as appropriate*)

- Personal experience as a child of parents with alcohol problems
- Personal experience of alcohol problems with self or others
- Interested in promoting the wellbeing of children
- To gain experience of working with children
- To gain experience of counselling
- Looked at a variety of charities and decided that I had most to contribute to Nacoa
- Other (please specify below)

Your comments:

Question 3

On average, how many hours a month have you volunteered? *(select one only)*

- Up to 6 hours
- 7 – 12 hours
- More than 12 hours

Question 4

Following the Nacoa foundation training programme, which of the following roles have you performed in the PAST (but no longer perform) or NOW? *(select as many as appropriate)*

	Past	Now
Helpline activities	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Fundraising	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Promoting the aims of Nacoa (formally or informally)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Trustee	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Speaker volunteer	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Administrative/Technical Support	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Helping at events, eg UPFEST	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Research activities	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Media support	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Organisational Issues**Question 5**

How helpful was the Nacoa foundation training programme, both to your role as a volunteer and in your activities outside of Nacoa? *(Please select from 1 to 5, with 1 being least helpful and 5 being most helpful)*

	1	2	3	4	5
As a Nacoa volunteer	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Outside of Nacoa	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Question 6

How well does the different aspects of the Nacoa organisational structure support you as a volunteer? *(Please select from 1 to 5, with 1 being least supportive and 5 being most supportive)*

	1	2	3	4	5
Volunteer meetings	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Helpline supervisor	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Nacoa policies and procedures	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
On-going training	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Open-door policy	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Question 7

How important are Nacoa social activities (eg Quiz nights, Awards Evening etc) to your volunteer experience? *(Please select from 1 to 5, with 1 being least important and 5 being most important)*

1	2	3	4	5
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Personal Experience**Question 8**

Which have been your most favourite and least favourite aspects of volunteering? *(select as many as appropriate)*

	Most Favourite	Least Favourite
Working on the Helpline (generally)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Answering phone calls on the Helpline	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Composing emails for the Helpline	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Data Entry for the Helpline	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Compiling information packs	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Public speaking on behalf of Nacoa	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Fundraising events	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Development opportunities (eg occupational, personal)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Meeting others committed to the same cause	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Being part of a volunteer-focused organisation	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Question 9

If you have been unable to volunteer as much as you would like, is this due to any of the following factors? *(select as many as appropriate)*

Work commitments	<input type="checkbox"/>
Family/social commitments	<input type="checkbox"/>
Health	<input type="checkbox"/>
Time	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other volunteer commitments	<input type="checkbox"/>
Distance	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other	<input type="checkbox"/>

Other reasons *(please specify briefly if possible)*

Question 10

Are there any changes you would suggest to improve volunteering at Nacoa?

Your comments:

Question 11

If you have any specific examples of how volunteering at Nacoa has had a significant impact on your life or those around you, please describe:

Your comments:

Do you have any other comments relating to the questions asked in this questionnaire?

Interviews

As part of this project we would like to interview a small number of volunteers later in the year (May - July). Please let us know if you would be willing to be interviewed to discuss these issues further. The interviews are expected to take 45 – 90 minutes either in person or by phone and will be undertaken by Anne-Marie Barron.

Please complete the contact details below if you would be willing to be interviewed. If you prefer your request to be separate from your questionnaire responses above, just email your name and preferred email address and phone number to research@nacoa.org.uk with the subject header Volunteer Questionnaire Interviews. Please note that we do not have the resources to interview all those who nominate themselves. We are grateful to all those who have completed the questionnaire and will use the results to further develop Nacoa and to support COAs. As always, many thanks for your time, support and contribution.

Name:
Email:
Phone:

Anne-Marie will be in touch after Easter to set up the project interviews.

Appendix B Interview Schedule

- 1. Setting the scene, your experience of Nacoa Foundation Training**
 - Your own experience of training, broad overview
 - Key issues or discussions (in training or outside)
 - What were your impressions of your group / cohort

- 2. The organisation**
 - Recruitment (formal and informal procedures: application, CRB checks etc).
 - Allocation of volunteer roles (Helpline, research, admin, other)
 - Nacoa policies and procedures etc.
 - Open door policy for all members of the organisation

- 3. Volunteer meetings**
 - Some volunteers find the monthly meetings very helpful and attend regularly but others do not; what is your experience?
 - Did you find the volunteer induction / mentoring system helpful?
 - Long serving/regular volunteers v episodic volunteers – main issues/differences?

- 4. The Nacoa identity**
 - How do you feel about being associated with Nacoa?
 - Does your role at Nacoa contribute to your sense of self?
 - Are others aware of your role at Nacoa?

- 5. Working on the helpline**
 - Examples of strategies that have worked for you. Lessons learnt, areas to avoid?
 - How aware are you of the different projects at Nacoa (eg Schools, COA week)?
 - Which do you prefer: being alone for a session, or working with other volunteers, and why?

- 6. Has being a volunteer at Nacoa had an impact on you, and in what ways**
 - Your own experience of alcohol/family issues
 - More widely in your day to day interactions
 - How would you describe being a Nacoa volunteer to a friend?

- 7. Other Issues**
 - Individual contributions to fundraising, mentoring, other events, eg UPFEST.
 - Please raise any issues that you feel we should have discussed but have not yet covered.

Thank you for your contribution to this Nacoa Project, your time has been much appreciated.

Appendix C Nacoa: Contributing to Research

One of Nacoa's aims is to promote research into the particular problems faced by those who grow up with parental alcoholism and the prevention of alcoholism developing in this vulnerable group of children. Over the years Nacoa, both the organisation as a whole and individuals within the organisation, has contributed to a variety of research projects and initiatives. In 2012 two focus groups were held at Nacoa offices with Nacoa volunteers who had experience of parental alcoholism.

The main recommendations from the project (Adamson & Templeton, 2012) were to do with including children and young people in research, service development and evaluation, to enhance the understanding of how best to respond to children's needs. However, the results from the focus groups are outlined in some detail in section 3 of the report and it might be helpful to consider a few of these.

The themes that emerged as being the most important to the participants of the two focus groups were: how alcohol is perceived by others, coping and resilience, and support. Three specific points listed below again underline the importance of the work of Nacoa:

- There is a need for support for young people when they are older (e.g. late teens/early 20s); this relates to the age of the majority of the participants when they accessed help and started talking about what the problems.
- This group of people hadn't accessed help other than Nacoa. They talked about what they gained through Nacoa, including the benefits of telephone support and of subsequently going through the Nacoa training to be a volunteer.
- Some of the young people talked about the benefits to understanding 'alcoholism' as a disease. They felt that approaching the topic from this angle might be a better approach to take in schools, rather than giving simplistic messages about units and harms associated with drinking. (Adamson & Templeton, 2012, p27, 28)