

PRESS RELEASE

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National survey paints portrait of village hall life: 12 million hours of volunteering, £11m of renovations and 38.6 million cups of tea

England's 10,000 village halls rely on more than 12 million hours of volunteering each year to deliver their vital role at the heart of rural communities, a new survey* has revealed.

The survey, by leading rural network ACRE (Action with Communities in Rural England), showed volunteers who run classes and events put in 2.5 million hours annually. That's on top of the estimated 9.6 million hours clocked up by management committees.

But more than half of the halls who responded said they were struggling to find new recruits to help manage the buildings – with people protesting that they were too busy, too old or simply not interested.

ACRE Village Halls Manager Deborah Clarke said: "People want to use village halls – but they don't want to commit to running them. It's understandable as there is a raft of duties to deal with, from licensing legislation to health and safety – but communities are in danger of taking their volunteers for granted.

"Younger people are especially hard to attract as they often work long hours away from villages in order to afford to live in them – while the newly retired often don't want to commit.

"Village halls provide social activities, clubs, classes and essential services for every age group – helping to combat loneliness and build a sense of community spirit. It's vital that people step up and volunteer to help halls move with the times – just an hour a week can make a difference."

ACRE, which runs an information and advice service for village halls through its nationwide network of rural community councils, carried out the survey to identify what support halls need and to illustrate the social value they add to rural life.

Key findings of the ACRE 2014 village halls survey include:

- Hall volunteers make a total commitment worth almost £85m annually, at a notional rate of £7 an hour.
- The average age of a village hall committee member is 58 – the age range stretches from 18 to 98

- Each village hall hosts an average of nine life events, such as weddings, christening parties or wakes each year – a grand total of 90,000 gatherings.
- More than 15,000 events to celebrate the Queen’s Diamond Jubilee were held at village halls in 2012.
- Village hall users and volunteers munch their way through a total of 47,500 packets of biscuits **each week** – washed down by 743,000 cups of tea. That’s nearly 2.5 million packets of biscuits and 38.6 million cups of tea **each year** – or 9.6 million litres (2.1 million gallons).
- An estimated £11m has been invested in work on village hall buildings in the past four years.
- The most popular uses for village halls are preschool and nursery groups; fitness classes; dance classes; clubs and groups for older people including luncheon clubs, retirement clubs, the University of the Third Age; and organisations for young people – including Scouts and Guides, youth clubs, and Girls’ and Boys’ Brigades.
- The survey showed the growth in popularity of fitness classes, particularly Pilates and Zumba, and dance activities from ballet to salsa.
- Around 1,000 village halls, or 10pc, host a community enterprise such as post office, community shop, coffee shop, library, cinema or farmers’ market. However, almost a quarter of all halls don’t derive any financial benefit from this activity.
- More than 90,000 individuals, small businesses and professionals use England’s village halls to earn their living, or part of it, during the year.
- Some of the more unusual activities at halls include Appalachian clog dancing, calligraphy, a big breakfast, a ‘Friendly Friday’ drop-in evening, curling and stick dressing.
- Nearly a quarter of halls were built before World War I, while an estimated 600 were built to commemorate World War I or individuals who perished during that conflict.

* ACRE undertook a survey of village halls across England. The survey returned 1,300 responses, (13%) that were used to derive the statistics for this report. For more information about the village halls service, visit www.acre.org.uk

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