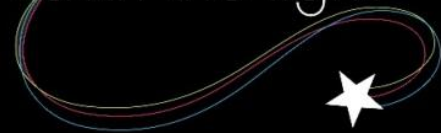




North Glasgow Voluntary Sector Network Widening Participation Study

By Catch the Light
Youth & Community Development
Consultancy
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catch the light




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Background

Established in 2008, the NGVSN exists to:

- Disseminate best practice
- Support the development and expansion of the voluntary sector generally
- To increase the professionalism and quality of delivery by North Glasgow voluntary providers
- To ensure the sector is represented at formal and informal planning structures
- To promote the role of the North Glasgow voluntary sector among local and city-wide planning partnerships and networks
 - By participating in appropriate GCVS networks to influence appropriate city wide policy
 - By ensuring relevant and appropriate consultation occurs among the sector

With almost 100 organisations listed on the database and an ambitious training programme underway, it could be argued that the NGVSN has made good progress within a relatively short timeframe. Yet a question occupying the minds of those with lead roles and responsibilities; is how to widen the reach and engagement of a greater range, number and diversity of local voluntary organisations.

Therefore this document reports on a small-scale consultation based on a survey of existing network members and a focus group with committee members. The consultation sought to understand why some members actively participate while others remain passive recipients of information. This information is then used to explore ways the network might increase levels of active participation.

Consultation Methods

The consultation methods were as follows:

Methods	Participants/Sources
Survey of members	36 Responses from 97 individual contacts
Focus group with committee representatives	3 Representatives
Database analysis and background research	Review of database, registration data and other associated documents

The work was carried out during the month of March 2011 and led to the findings discussed in this report. It is noted that the findings are useful to the NGVSN but are only representative of those responding or participating in the consultation process. They do not have any significance beyond the purpose intended by the NGVSN.

About the NGVSN

The NGVSN database contains details for 97 individuals from 95 different organisations or projects all operating within North Glasgow. The only reason the numbers are not the same is that two organisations have two projects which are distinct from each other. Given the number and range of organisations, from local churches and community self-help groups to large national and international charities; there is justification for using a network approach to bring relevant organisations together to gain collective advantages.

In pursuit of its objectives the NGVSN carries out activities which are typical of most voluntary sector networks in Scotland. These include for example:

- **Providing a forum for sharing information and ideas**
- **Coordinating and representing collective views to influence policy and practice**
- **Promoting good practice, reducing inequalities and raising awareness**

One of the main aspects of the network in North Glasgow is to hold network meetings and to organise training based on identified needs. In 2011 five free training courses and two wider network events were held. The training programme came about as a result of consultation with members and securing an appropriate training budget. The number of registrations for each event and training session are as follows [see table 1]:

Table 1: Registrations for Events & Programmes

	Wider Network	Tendering & Managing Contracts	Employment Law Feb 16	Employment Law 2 31 03 11	Managing Safely	First Aid March 14 17 31	Wider Sector Network June 25
No of Registrations	18	9	16	9	6	10	13
% of Database (97)	18.6%	9.3%	16.5%	9.3%	6.2%	10.3%	13.4%

The greatest attendance was for the wider network event where almost one fifth of members took part. Subsequently the highest level of attendance was for the 'Employment Law' training session and the lowest attendance was for 'Managing Safely'. When viewed as a proportion of the NGVSN database the attendance levels appear low. However a total of 59 individuals benefited from the training and events provided.

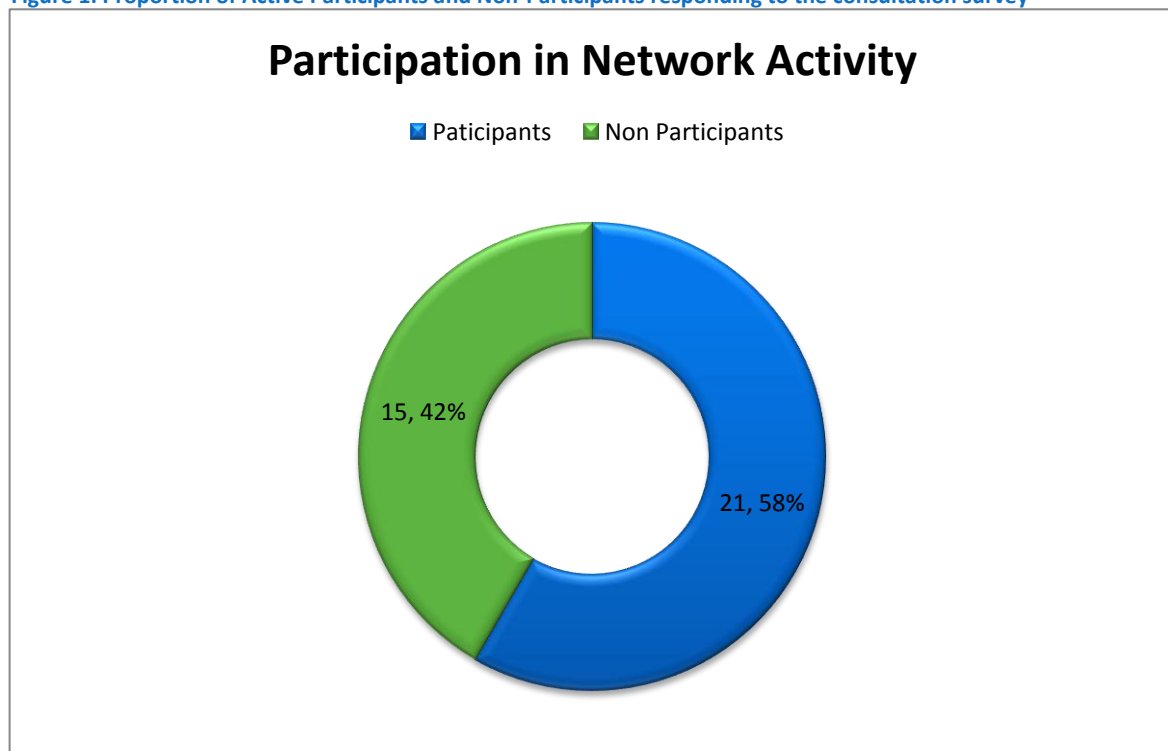
With organisations able to register more than one person for each training session or event; the number of organisations is considerably less, with only 31 distinct organisations taking an active part. Therefore a third of organisations have played an active part in recent network events and training. A key question for this report is whether there is sufficient scope and potential to extend this in future or whether alternatives require consideration.

The Consultation Findings

The survey respondents

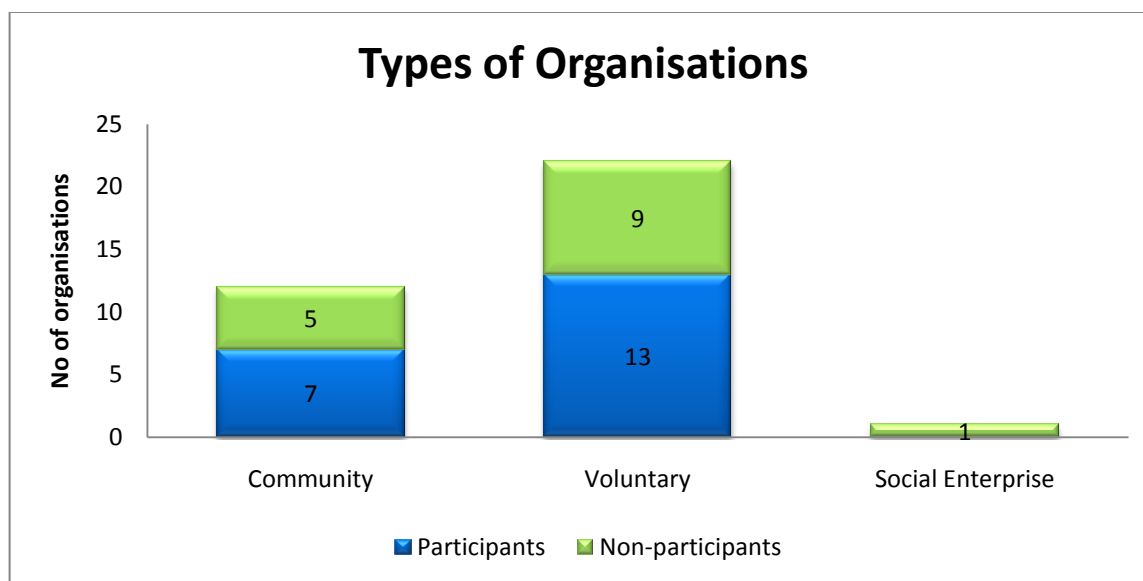
For the survey 36 responses were received (38% of the NGVSN database). To compare results from active and passive members responses were categorised as 'Participants' or 'Non-participants'. A critical element of the consultation was to ensure a reasonable number of 'Non-participants' responded. A target of 10 was set and 15 responses were received (23% of identified Non-participants) [see figure 1] .

Figure 1: Proportion of Active Participants and Non-Participants responding to the consultation survey



Voluntary organisations generally fall into three types: local community organisations, voluntary organisations or social enterprises. Organisations responding to the survey selected the classifications illustrated in figure two [see figure 2]. Figure two shows that almost two-thirds of organisations (22, 63%) are classified as voluntary organisations. Although only one organisation listed itself as a social enterprise there are other service providers, such as housing associations and large-scale social service providers, which undertake social enterprise activity.

Figure 2: Types of organisations responding to the survey



Columns are displayed as 'Participants' – organisations that actively participated in network activities and 'Non-participants' those that did not participate in network activities. This breakdown was applied to see if there were any similarities or differences between them. In figure two the types of organisations are similar for both. However when we compared numbers personnel (employees, board/committee members and volunteers) some differences were revealed [see table 2].

Table 2: The personnel resources available to network members (participants and non-participants)

ALL SURVEY RESPONDENTS				
	Employees	Board/Committee	Volunteers	
MEAN	12.8	7.5	11.8	
TOTAL	434	234	391	
MAXIMUM	56	20	65	
MINIMUM	1	0	0	
PARTICIPANTS				
MEAN	14.3	7.4	13.7	
TOTAL	285	133	273	
MAX	56	14	40	
MIN	2	0	0	
NON-PARTICIPANTS				
MEAN	10.6	7.8	9.1	
TOTAL	149	101	118	
MAX	44	20	65	
MIN	1	0	0	

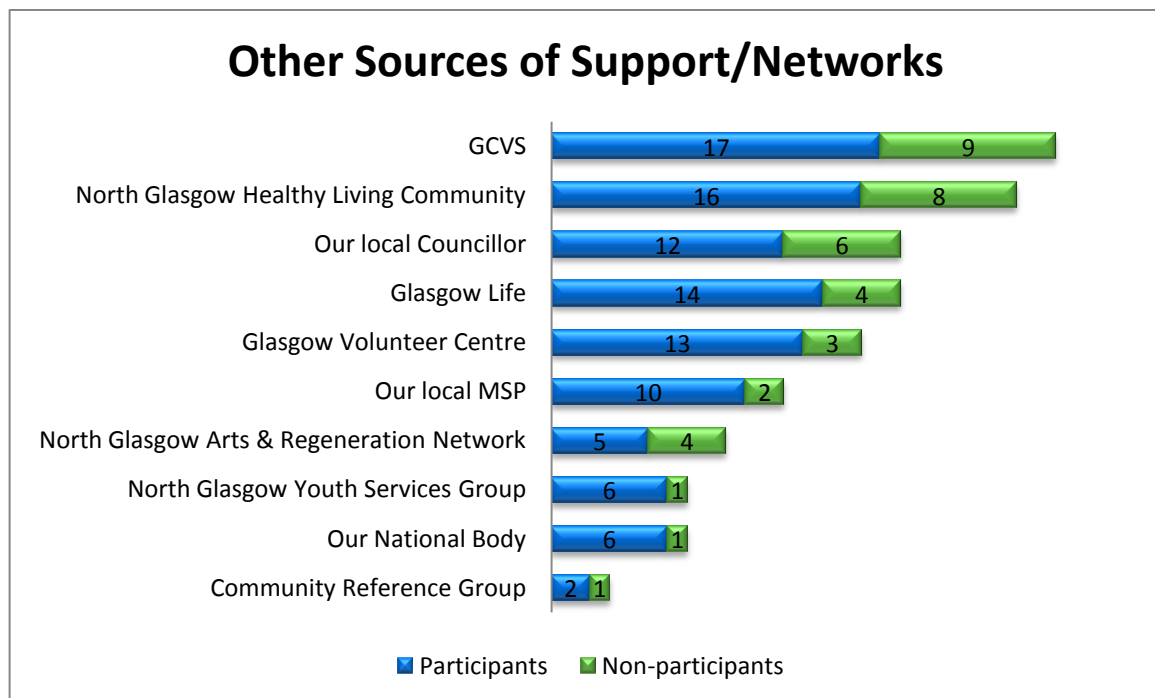
All member organisations responding to the survey have at least one or more employees. This is not necessarily typical given that a feature of voluntary and community organisations is that they can run on voluntary effort alone. One explanation for this is that organisations without employees have not been able to respond to the survey. Alternatively it is possible that organisations operating in the North area are sufficiently resourced to employ staff.

When comparisons are made between participants and non-participants, there are an average of almost four more employees and five more volunteers in 'participant' organisations than there are in non-participant organisations. The highest number of employees is within 'participant' organisations while the highest number of volunteers is within 'non-participant' organisations. The lowest number of employees among 'participant' organisations is two; however this reduces to one for 'non-participant' organisations. Hence there may be greater limitations on 'non-participant' organisations' personnel resources which make it more difficult to participate in network activities.

Alternative Support/Networks

Consideration should also be given to the other support/networks organisations are linked with. When members were asked if they get network/support from a list of alternative sources to NHVSN the following picture emerged [see figure 3]:

Figure 3: Alternative sources of support/networks used by survey respondents

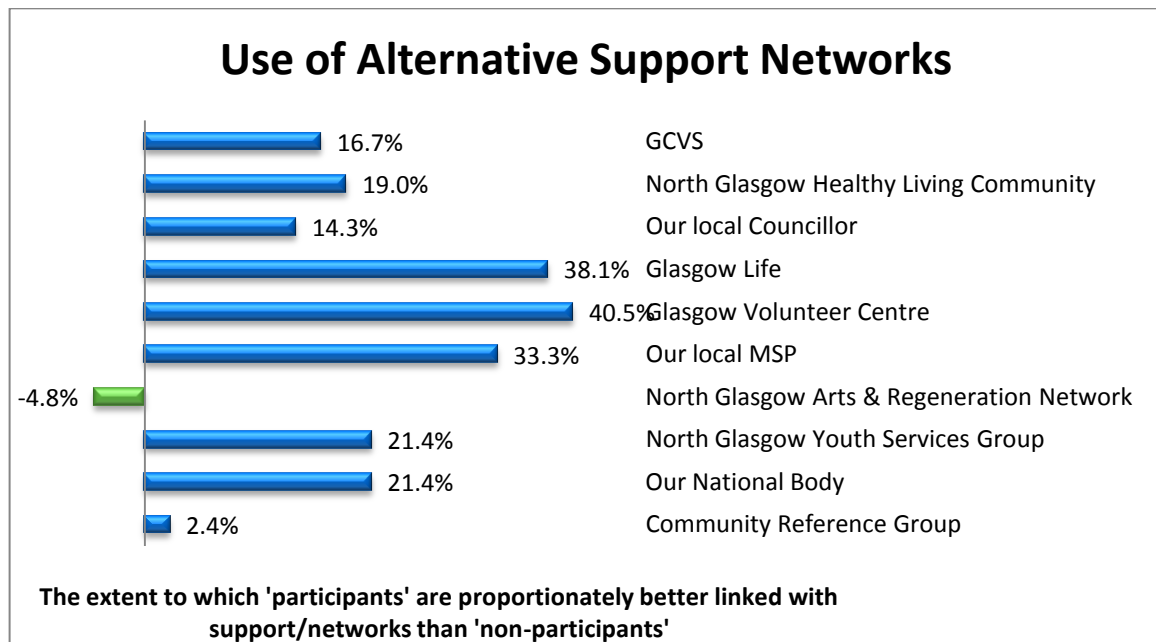


Almost three-quarters (74%) of all organisations are linked to GCVS¹, which is the Third Sector intermediary for the whole of Glasgow. More interesting however is that more than two-thirds of respondents (69%) reported getting support from the North Glasgow Healthy Living Community. When this was discussed with the NGVSN committee it transpired that because the Healthy Living Centre is contracted to coordinate activities on behalf of the NGVSN, members appear to have mistakenly associated the communications and activities with the Health Living Centre rather than seeing the NGVSN as a separate entity. This is worthy of further exploration.

Local Councillors appear to play an important supporting role for more than half (51%) of members. Similarly Glasgow Life² is also referred to by half (51%) of members. Although two thematic networks were listed they only appear to be relevant to a small proportion of members. Around a quarter of members (26%) belong to the North Glasgow Arts & Regeneration Network and a fifth of members (20%) belong to the North Glasgow Youth Services Group.

When participants and non-participants were compared it revealed that a much higher proportion of 'participants' were connecting with almost all other sources of support or networks. This was especially true in relation to accessing support from Glasgow Volunteer Centre, Glasgow Life and the Local MSP. The one exception was in relation to the North Glasgow Arts & Regeneration Network, which was accessed by a slightly higher proportion (5%) of 'non-participants'[see figure 4].

Figure 4: Comparison of participants' and non-participants' use of alternative support networks



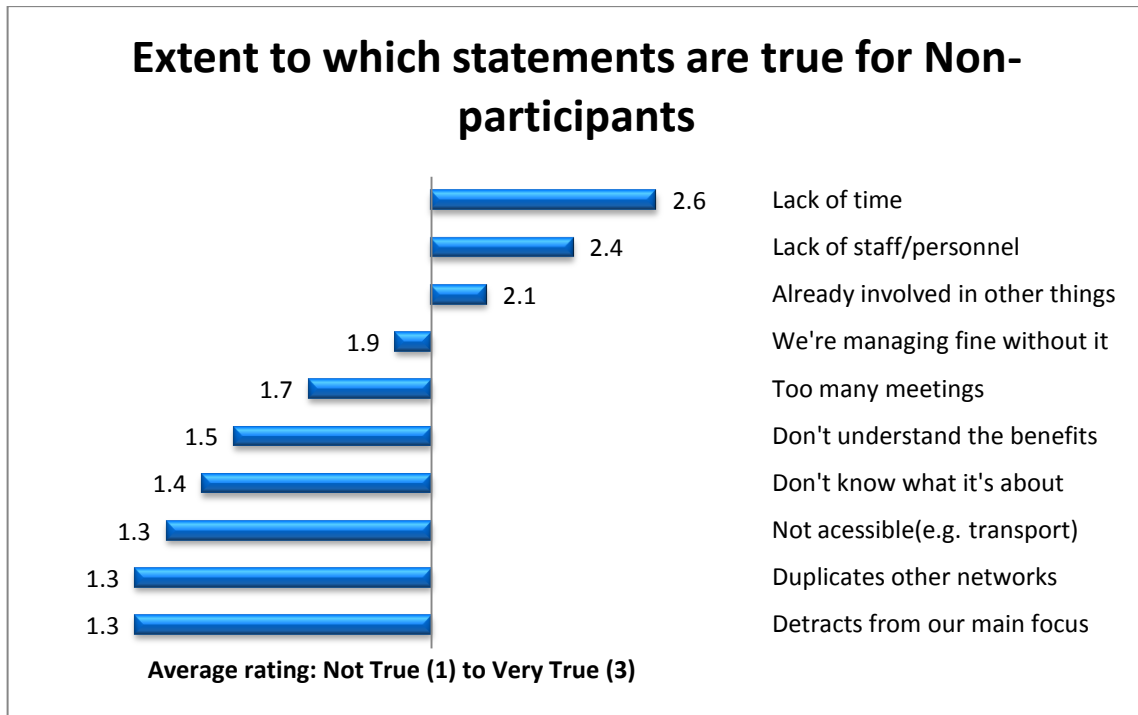
¹ See GCVS website for more information on their support services <http://www.gcvcs.org.uk/>

² See Glasgow Life's website for more information on their support services <http://www.glasgowlife.org.uk/communities/east-glasgow/community-support/Pages/home.aspx>

Understanding Participation Patterns

Understanding the reasons for not participating should therefore answer some of the questions being pondered by the network organisers. Non-participants were therefore presented a list of statements with potential reasons for not participating [see figure 5].

Figure 5: Reasons for not participating - responses from non-participants

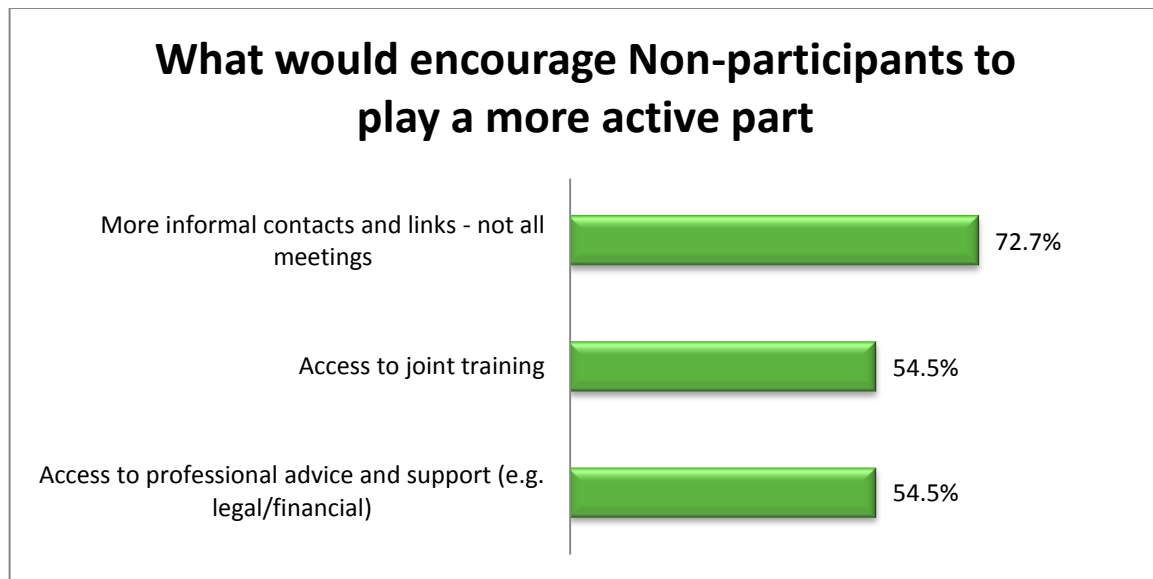


Whether respondents found the statements to be true or not, clear messages are conveyed at each end of the scale. The majority of ‘Non-participants’ (73%) believe that ‘lack of time’ is the statement which is ‘very true’ to them. This is closely followed by the ‘lack of staff/personnel’ which 58% of non-participants believe is ‘very true’ adding further to previous discussion. Something alluded to by the range of alternative support/networks available is that 36% of participants claim it is ‘very true’ that they are ‘already involved in other things’.

In contrast the notion that the NGVSN ‘detracts from our main focus’ or ‘duplicates other networks’ is perceived as ‘not true’ for 71% of non-participants. Similarly most non-participants appear to disagree that they don’t know what the NGVSN is about, they don’t find it inaccessible and they do understand its benefits.

Thus it can be argued to a greater or lesser extent that if the issues of lack of time and lack of staff/personnel for non-participants can be addressed or supported by the network it might lead to increased involvement from a wider proportion of network members. Areas for further development are intimated in the top three responses to what would encourage non-participants to play a more active part in the NGVSN [see figure 6].

Figure 6: Top three responses - what would encourage non-participants to play a more active part in the NGVSN



Effectively non-participants seek more informal network contact. In all probability non-participants' network activities require less demands on limited levels of staff time. Despite their lack of involvement in the most recent training programme, there is apparent support among more than half of non-participants for continuing to provide joint training. Comments suggest that this will only be prioritised when the training is pitched at an appropriate level for organisations, as explained in this feedback:

“We would take part if the training was relevant.”

“I think a main reason why people find it difficult to take part is the size of the organisations and the inability to take time out of an already overstretched workload with limited 'man' power. I think the training is often pitched at a 'high brow' level and perhaps not applicable to volunteers and staff on the ground who may have more time to access training and therefore be able to support senior staff better to release them for training!”

Non-participants also support the development of a new area of activity - providing network access to professional advice and support. This would enhance network advantages, much in the way consortium purchasing works. The precise areas where this is needed and how it would operate would nevertheless require further investigation.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The NGVSN membership is relatively large with a diverse range of mainly voluntary and community organisations. About one third of member organisations have actively participated in network events or training on offer in the past year (59 individuals from 31 organisations). Other network members can therefore be described as passive recipients of network information.

A reasonable response rate of 38% was achieved for the survey. More than half (58%) of respondents are categorised as participants and the rest (42%) are classified as 'non-participants'. All organisations responding to the survey have at least one employee.

Participant organisations have on average four more employees and five more volunteers than non-participant organisations.

Three quarters of all organisations responding to the survey are linked to the support services available from GCVS.

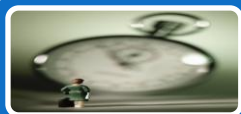
Further investigation is required to clarify whether members fully understand the role North Glasgow Health Living Centre undertakes on behalf of NGVSN. This might lead to exploring ways of raising the profile and improving communication relating to the NGVSN.

Participants are essentially more active than non-participants in accessing support from a wide range of relevant sources. The only exception is non-participants' greater involvement in the North Glasgow Arts & Regeneration Network. Lack of time and lack of staff/personnel are the most significant barriers which prevent non-participants from becoming more involved.

Indications are that reducing demands on limited personnel time and resources will lead to increased levels of involvement. It is possible that this could be achieved through continuing to provide access to joint training, but making this more relevant to a wider range of organisational capacities. There is also scope to explore activities that maximise the benefits of belonging to a network, such as joint purchasing/contracting of advice and expertise. Put simply the recommendations are illustrated below:



Improve the promotion & communication of NGVSN and relevance to wider network members



Reduce demands on personnel time & resources



Explore activities which maximise network advantages