



# Wellbeing among Volunteers

September 2023

 mind Suffolk

**Volunteers** are roughly **twice** as **likely** to be **meeting Needs well** than **non-volunteers**

Nearly **6 in 10 volunteers** in Suffolk are **meeting their Needs** well overall, compared with **4 in 10 non-volunteers**

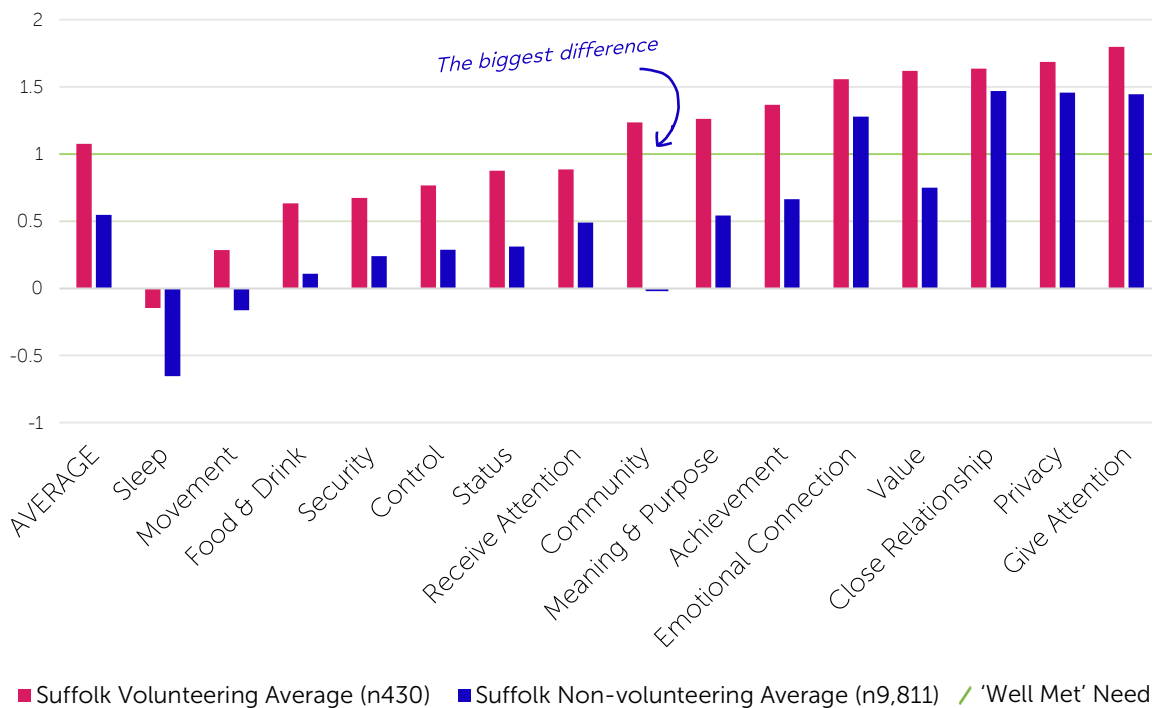
**Men who volunteer** are **twice** as likely to be **meeting their Needs** well than **men who don't volunteer**

**Volunteers** are **three times as likely** to have a strong sense of **Meaning & Purpose** in their live than **non-volunteers**

**8 in 10 volunteers aged 75 and over** feel well rested after **Sleep**, versus **5 in 10 non-volunteers aged 75+**

**Part-time workers who volunteer** are nearly **four times as likely** to be meeting their Needs well than **part-time workers who don't volunteer**

## Does wellbeing differ among Volunteers and Non-Volunteers?



*This graph shows average results, from the Emotional Needs Audit, of volunteers and non-volunteers in Suffolk. For an in-depth look at graphs contained throughout this report, please see the Appendices.*

Using data collected over one year (13<sup>th</sup> June 2022 to 13<sup>th</sup> June 2023), we can compare average wellbeing amongst volunteers and non-volunteers in Suffolk.

When comparing the two, we can see that volunteers are meeting **twice** as many Needs well on average than non-volunteers in Suffolk – meeting 8 of 15 Needs well on average, compared with 4 of 15, respectively.

All the Needs are better met by volunteers than non-volunteers on average, with the biggest differences being for **Community, Value, Meaning & Purpose, and Achievement.**

Contributing towards something bigger than ourselves, being connected to others, and feeling that we are achieving can all help to keep us well. And volunteering can do just that – often providing people with a sense of giving back – but does volunteering really make a difference when it comes to meeting our emotional Needs?

This report explores this question, looking at how volunteering may help individuals, and groups of people, to better meet their Needs.



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# How do we measure wellbeing?

Suffolk Mind's research team is gathering anonymous data from the local population all the time. We ask people how well they are meeting their Emotional Needs, using our validated mental health measure: the Emotional Needs Audit (ENA).

## What do we mean by 'meeting a need'?

Respondents are asked to score how well each of their emotional and physical Needs are met on a scale of -3 to 3, with a 0 mid-point. We class a Need as being 'well met' if it scores 1 or above. We class a Need as being unmet if it scores 0 or below. When we talk about how well populations are meeting all of their Needs on average, we have averaged how well they are meeting their 15 emotional and physical Needs, and applied the same thresholds as we do with individual Needs.

## What other information do we gather?

We also ask people about the factors that might be influencing how well their Needs are met at the moment. This includes barriers to meeting Needs; for example, their finances or their physical and mental health. We also collect data on supporting factors that enable people to meet their Needs, such as their relationships or their community involvement.

And finally, we also ask for a few personal details so that we can understand what is happening within various demographic groups and identify any differences amongst groups; for example, based on sexuality or gender identity.

Our findings inform service development at Suffolk Mind and help us identify opportunities and needs within public services.

## The Emotional Needs

**Sleep** helps calm emotions and repairs our body. We can tell our Need for Sleep is met when we feel rested after waking up

**Food & Drink** is about feeling you get energy, nutrition and pleasure from your diet – however that looks for you

**Control** is feeling we are free to make choices for ourselves, and part of meeting this Need is recognising that there are things we can't control

**Meaning & Purpose** is feeling motivated and that there is a point to getting out of bed in the morning. This can be met through meeting our Need for Achievement, through helping other people, or by being part of something bigger than ourselves

**Achievement** is met by feeling stretched and challenged by the things we do

**Emotional Connection** is about feeling connected in smaller, more intimate groups. **Close Relationships** is about feeling we can be completely ourselves around at least one other person (or a pet!)

**Movement** isn't just about going to the gym or out for a run. Getting our heart rate above resting level just three to four times a week – whether that's a brisk walk, dancing or hoovering – is enough to trigger an endorphin release equivalent in its effect to anti-depressant medication

**Security** is to do with our need to feel safe and secure in our surroundings. Some examples of where we meet our Need for Security is in our housing situation, financially or in relationships

**Privacy** is about being able to get time away from distractions and have time to process our thoughts and emotions

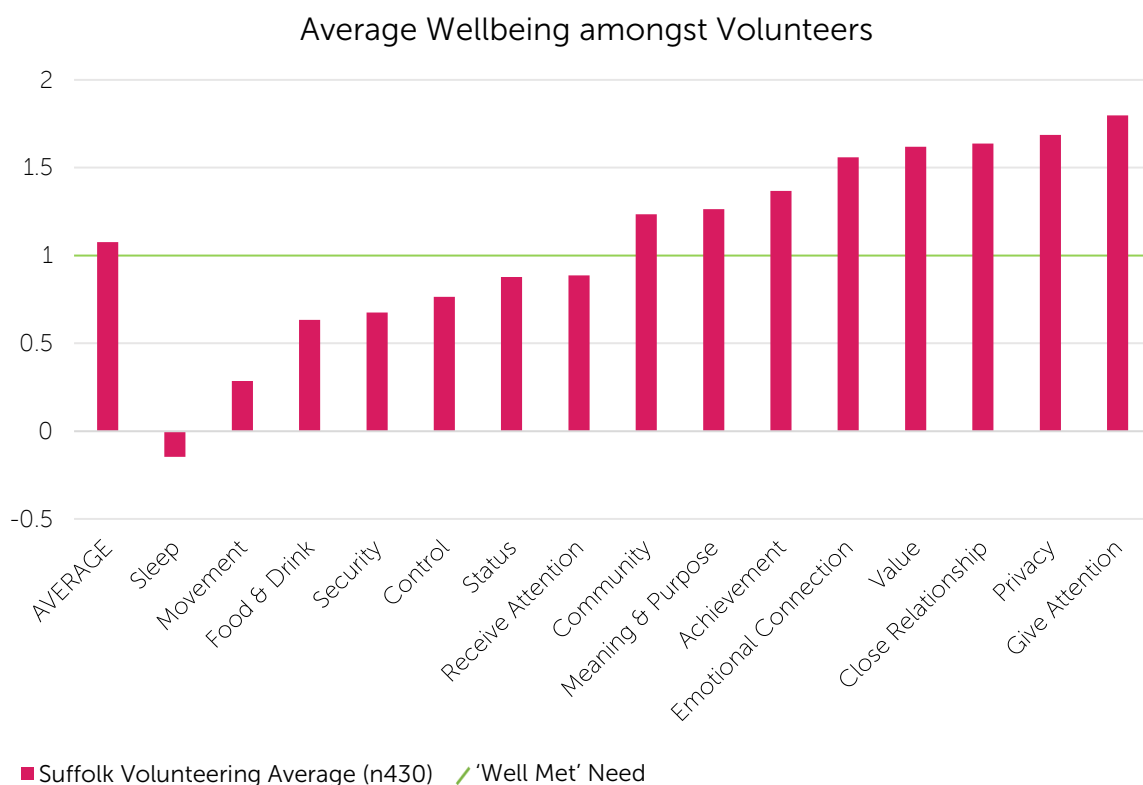
**Status** is met by feeling appreciated and respected as a person. **Value** is about feeling appreciated for our actions and contributions

**Giving and Receiving Attention** is about exchanging positive attention with those around us. It is a finite resource, but can be replenished by better meeting the Need for Privacy

**Community** is met when we feel we're part of a group

## How is wellbeing amongst Volunteers?

Over the span of a year (13<sup>th</sup> June 2022 to 13<sup>th</sup> June 2023), we received 430 responses from volunteers in Suffolk. Of all 430 volunteers, **58%** were meeting their Needs well overall (i.e., having an overall average score of 1 or more across all Needs). This makes volunteers roughly twice as likely to be meeting Needs well than non-volunteers in Suffolk.



To view this graph on the full scale (-3 to 3) and see exact scores per Need, see Appendix 1.

Volunteers are meeting **8 of the 15** Needs well on average (i.e., having an average score of 1 or more). The best met Need on average is **Giving Attention**, suggesting that volunteers feel able to give others the time and attention they deserve. Volunteers also feel able to take time to themselves to recoup afterwards, with their Need for **Privacy** being the second best met Need on average.

**Sleep** is also much better met by volunteers on average, and we know that stress arising from unmet Needs can lead to disruptions in our Sleep. Our data on volunteers shows us that Meaning & Purpose and Sleep are strongly positively correlated. Therefore, as our score for Meaning & Purpose increases, it's likely that so would our score for Sleep (and vice versa).

## Community

Volunteers are feeling well connected in larger groups, meeting their Need for Community much better on average than the Suffolk average. Of those who were meeting this Need well and identified supporting factors that enable them to do so:

- **72%** (n58) attributed feeling connected in larger groups to their **community involvement**
- **58%** (n47) voiced that their **hobbies and/or interests** support them to meet their Need for Community
- **42%** (n34) thought their **day-to-day environment** helped

“I love the diversity of volunteering opportunities and community involvement.”

## Meaning & Purpose

Meaning & Purpose is also much better met amongst volunteers, on average, than it is among the Suffolk average. Since we can help ourselves to better meet our Need for Meaning & Purpose by contributing towards something bigger than ourselves, it's not surprising that volunteers told us the following:

“Being involved with the local community and encouraging others to join in activities and support each other gives me a great feeling knowing I am helping people.”

“To be a volunteer helps very much as I feel useful. It is also good to meet people and to have conversations and laugh together.”



## Does volunteering support wellbeing?

With Suffolk's Need for **Community** reaching an all-time low in summer 2022, now is a better time than ever to get involved in your local community.

One way to do this can be through volunteering, and our research shows that those who volunteer are meeting their Needs better than their non-volunteering counterparts.

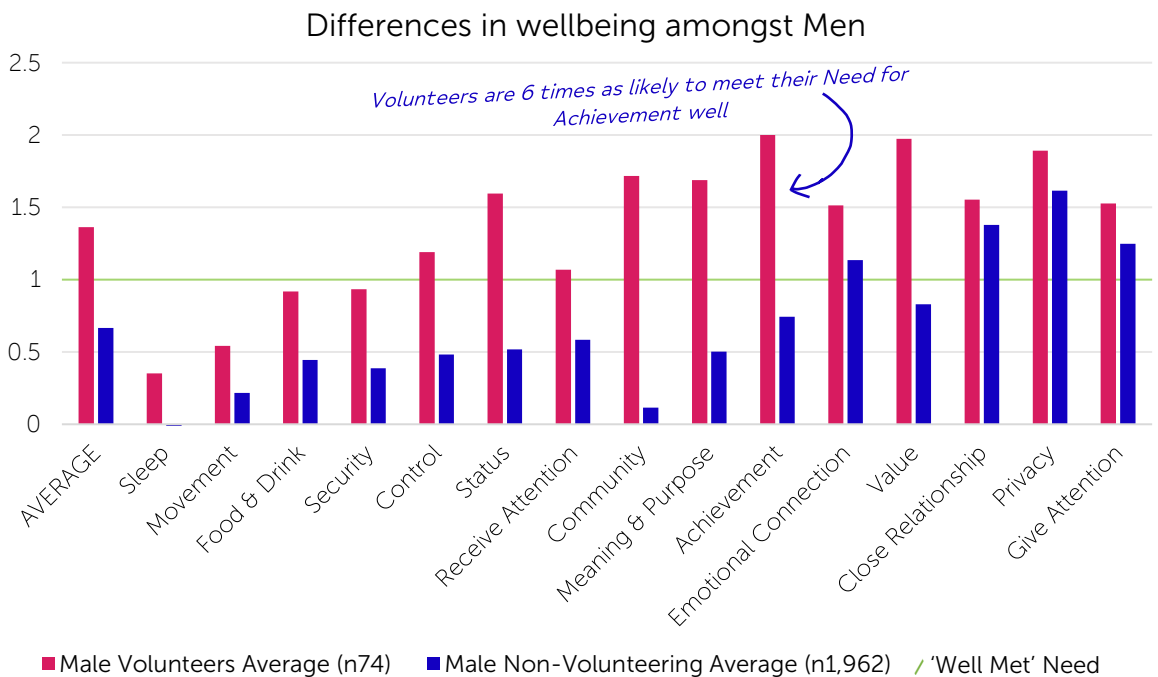
### Wellbeing amongst men (including trans men)

On average, men (including trans men) who volunteer are meeting their emotional Needs much better than men overall. **66%** of **men who volunteer** are meeting their Needs well overall, according to our Suffolk results, compared with just **45%** of **men who don't volunteer** meeting their Needs well overall.

Men who volunteer were meeting **11 of the 15** Needs well, on average, compared with just 4 of 15 Needs being met by the average man in Suffolk.

Men who volunteer are nearly four times as likely to be meeting their Need for **Community** well than men who don't volunteer. Among men who volunteer, are meeting this Need well and identified supporting factors that enable them to do so, **61%** (n11) stated that their **community involvement** helps them to feel connected.

Men who volunteer are also over six times as likely to feel that they are **achieving and stretched** in at least one major areas of their lives than their non-volunteering counterparts.



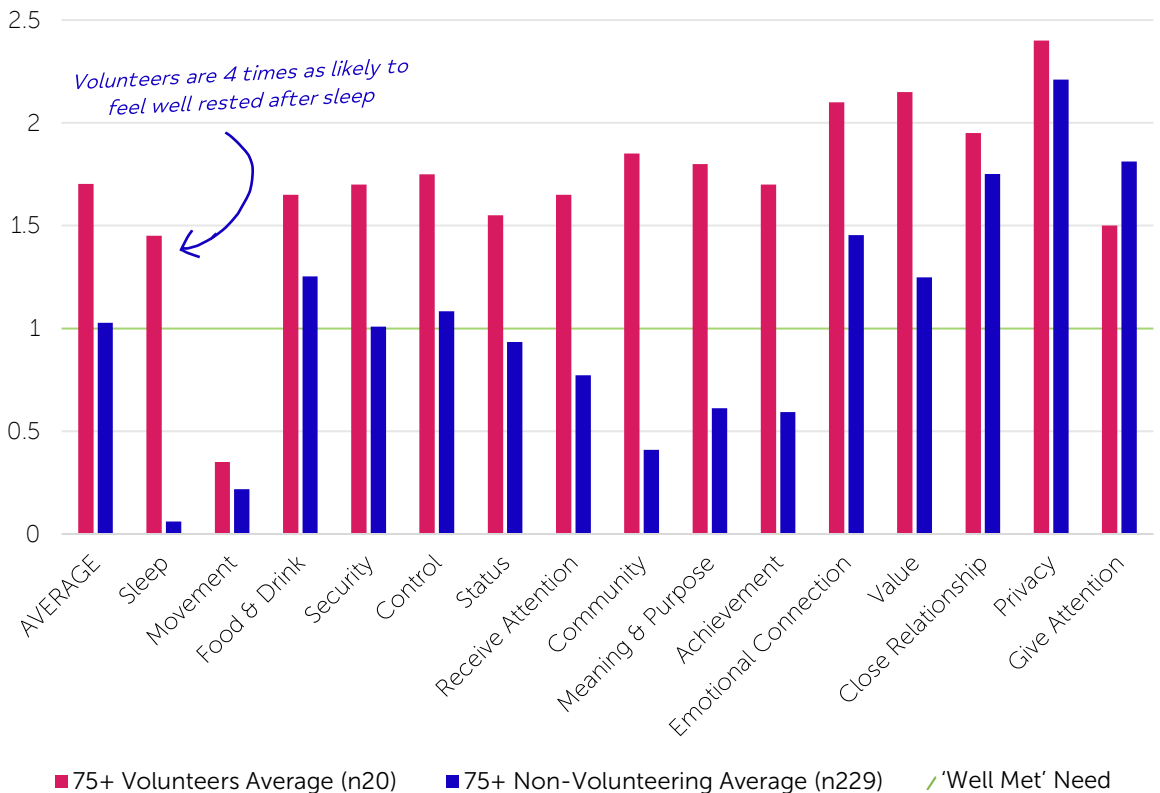
## Wellbeing amongst those aged 75 and over

On average, retired respondents and those aged 75 and over are among our most well demographic groups across the Suffolk average. However, **75s+ who volunteer** are meeting their Needs even better than their peers who don't volunteer – meeting **all of their Needs well aside from one. Movement** is the only Need not well met by 75s+ who volunteer, which may in part be due to issues around mobility that this age group can experience.

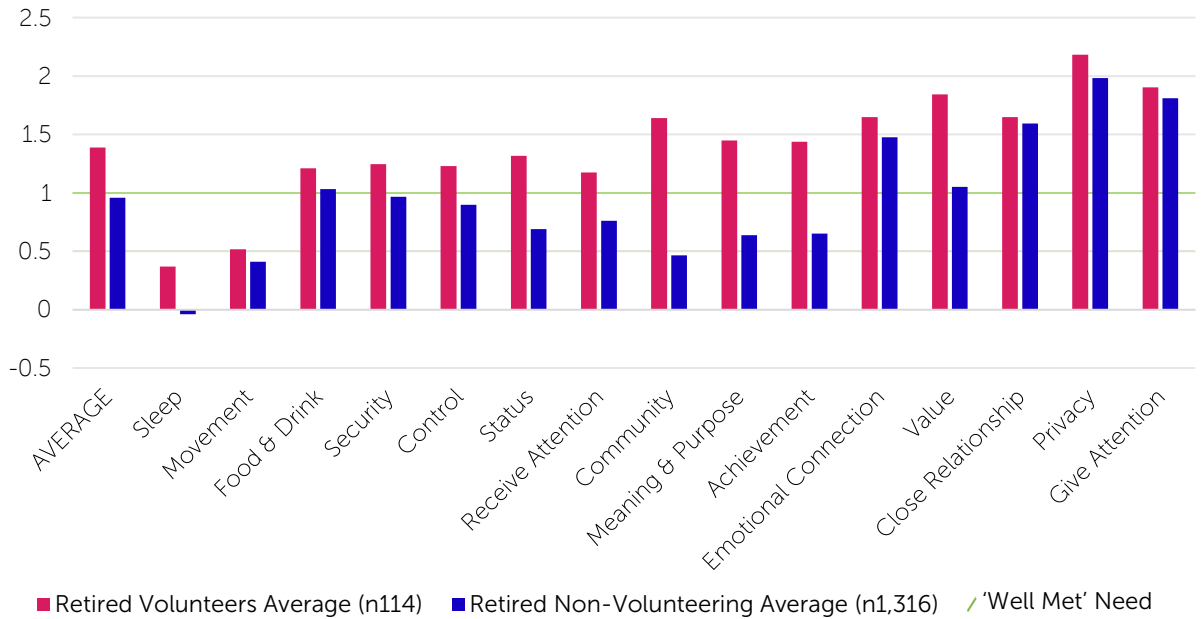
75s+ who volunteer are meeting their Need for **Community** notably more well, on average, than 75s+ who don't volunteer. Comments from respondents tell us that some 75s+ are feeling the effects of social isolation, particularly since the COVID-19 pandemic, and this can have a detrimental impact on our wellbeing. Volunteering may help to address this social isolation, as the biggest supporting factors for Community identified by 75s+ who volunteer were their:

- **Community involvement (67%**, n4 of those meeting this Need well and who selected supporting factors chose this)
- **Hobbies and/or interest (67%**, n4)
- **Relationships (67%**, n4)

Differences in wellbeing amongst 75+



Differences in wellbeing amongst Retired respondents



### Wellbeing amongst retired respondents

As with those aged 75 and over, retired respondents who volunteers have higher average scores than non-volunteering retired respondents do, on average. They are meeting **twice as many Needs** well, on average, compared with retired respondents who aren't volunteering - meeting 13 of the 15 Needs well, on average, compared with 6 of 15 Needs, respectively.

**Achievement** is much better met amongst both 75s+ and retired respondents who volunteer, with their **community involvement** being a top supporting factor. Since people's work situations can enable them to meet their Need for Achievement well, being the top supporting factor across the Suffolk average, those who are retired, or of retirement age, can meet their Need for Achievement less well than those who are in employment. Volunteering may, therefore, fill the gap retirement can leave – enabling those of retirement age to feel as though they are achieving and stretched in a different area of their lives.

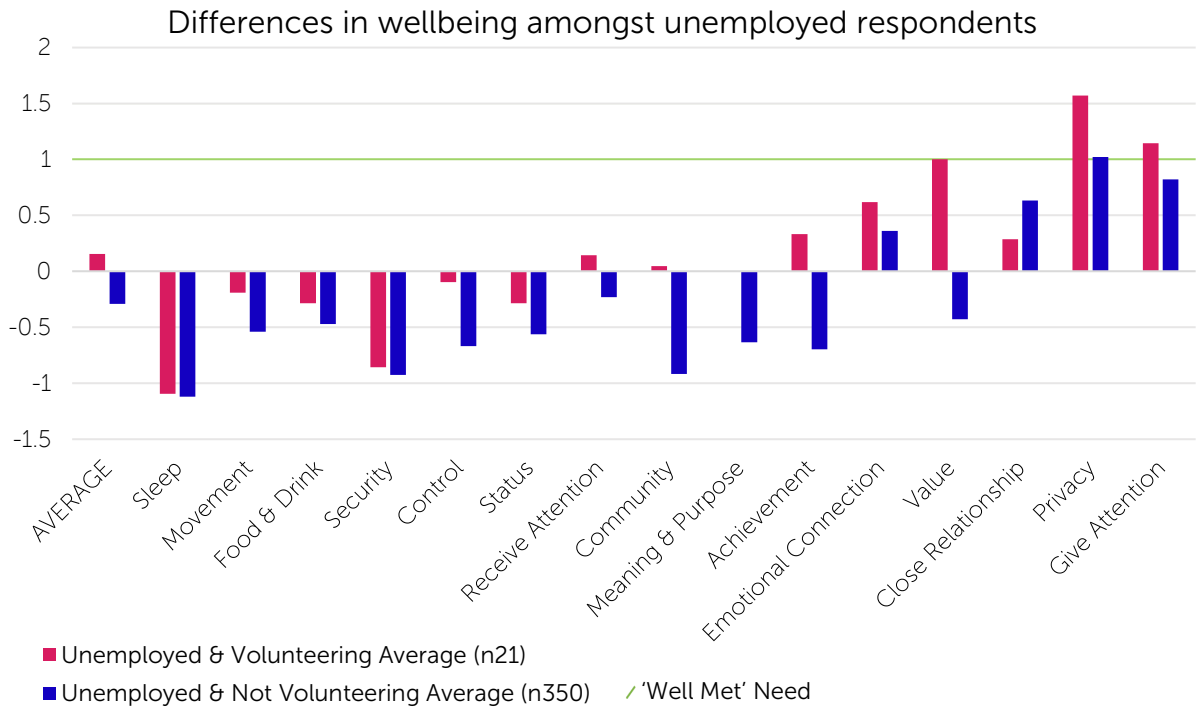
This can help to ensure individuals feel purposeful and believe that their actions have meaning, as our data shows that **Achievement** and **Meaning & Purpose** are strongly positively correlated Needs. Therefore, as the average score for one Need increases, it is expected that the other will also. Retired respondents who volunteer have placed emphasis on the Meaning & Purpose volunteering brings to their lives, telling us that:

“Being able to volunteer has helped as it gives me sense of purpose after retiring.”

“Volunteering has not only given me a purpose but I have also been able to make friends.”

## Wellbeing amongst unemployed respondents

Unemployed respondents are among the least well groups across the Suffolk average – with unemployed respondents being three times less likely to meet Needs well than those in some kind of employment. Yet, unemployed respondents who are volunteering score much higher than their non-volunteering counterparts on average.



Results are similar for those who identified that they are unable to work – available to view on Appendix 2.

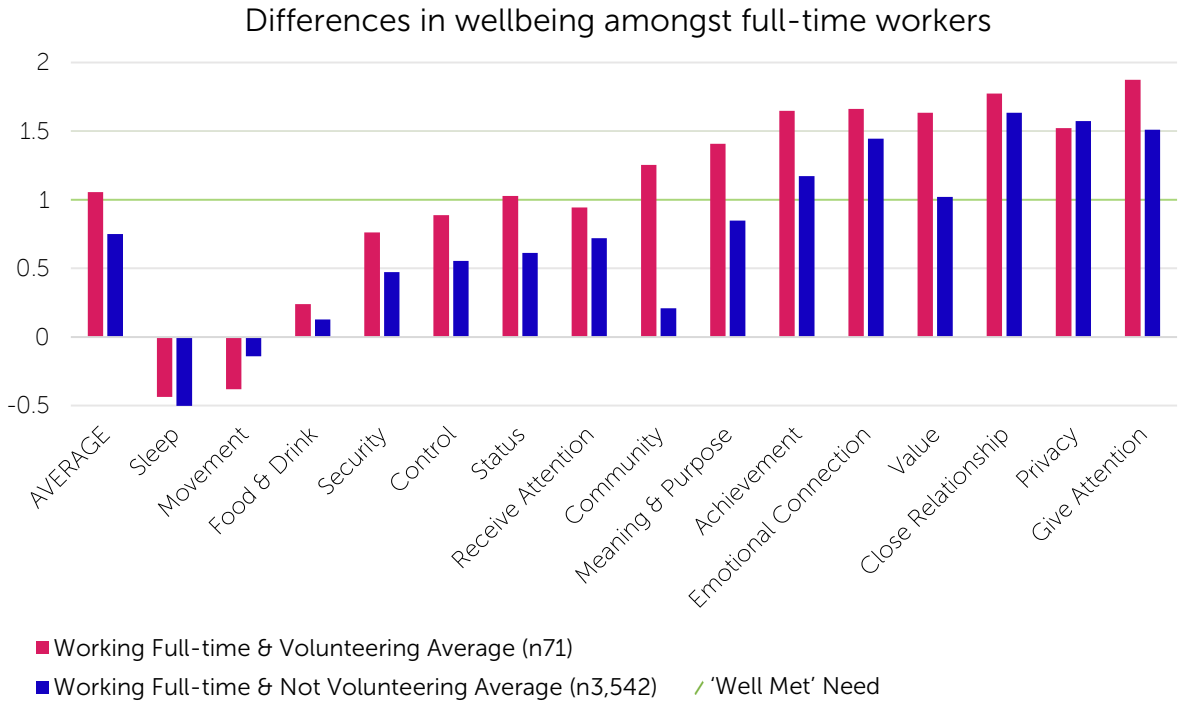
**Unemployed volunteers** are meeting their Need for **Value**, on average, much better than the unemployed non-volunteer average. This suggests that they are feeling valued and respected for their contributions. This could be through their voluntary work, as people’s **community involvement** is among the top supporting factors identified by volunteers meeting this Need well.

Although **Meaning & Purpose** is unmet amongst unemployed volunteers on average, it is much better met than the unemployed non-volunteer average. Some unemployed volunteers have specifically attributed meeting their Need for Meaning & Purpose to their voluntary work, with one respondent telling us:

“I currently volunteer, which gives me a sense of achievement and meaning and purpose, as I am not currently working.”

## Wellbeing amongst those in full-time work

Those in full-time work are also more likely to be meeting their Needs well if they volunteer. Unlike their non-volunteering counterparts, on average, full-time workers who volunteer are meeting their Needs well overall – with an average overall score above 1.

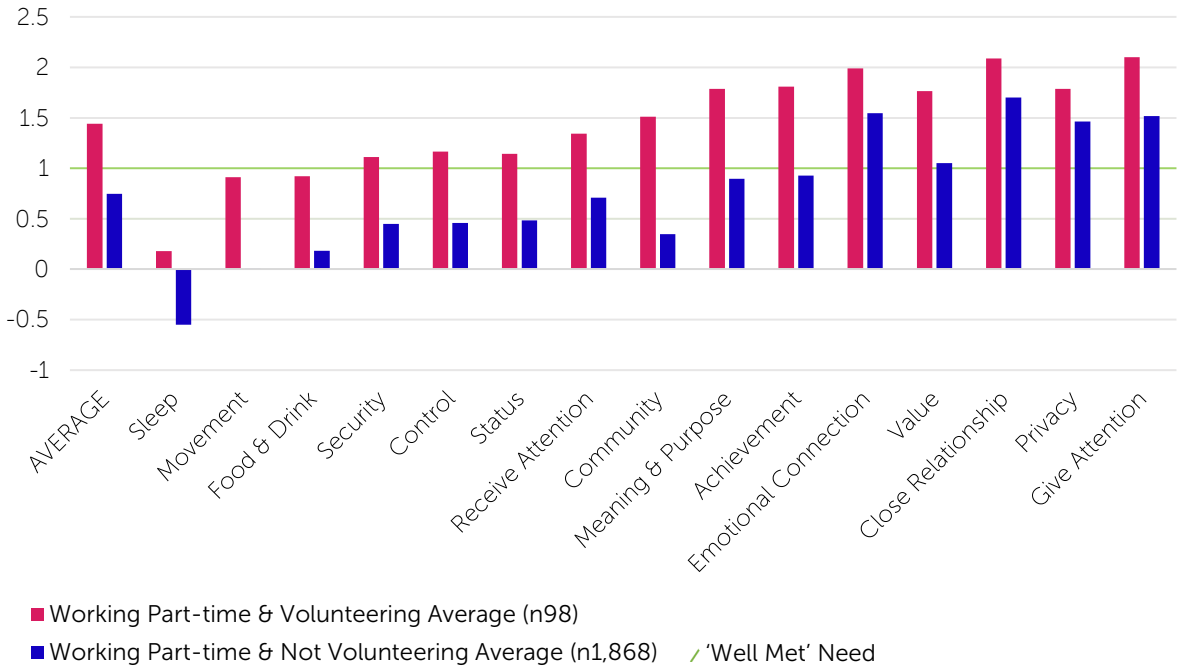


On average, they are also meeting their Need for **Meaning & Purpose** much better than those who don't volunteer. Among those who are meeting this Need well, and identified environmental factors that support them to do so:

Just **16%** (n65) of those in full-time work who don't volunteer attributed this to their **community involvement**,

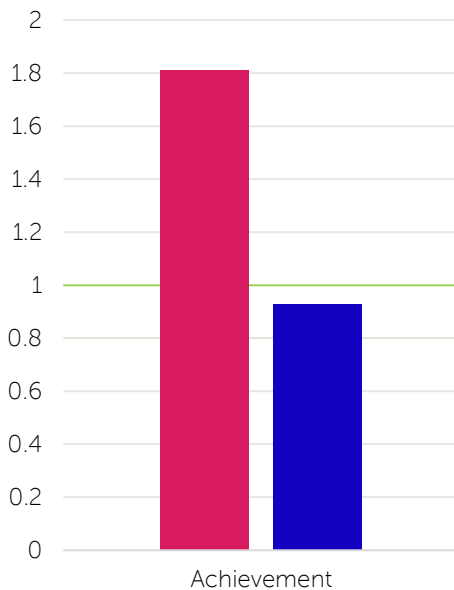
compared with **56%** (n9) of those in full-time work who do volunteer.

## Differences in wellbeing amongst part-time workers



### Wellbeing amongst those in part-time work

People who work part-time and volunteer are around four times as likely to be meeting their Needs well than those who work part-time but don't volunteer.



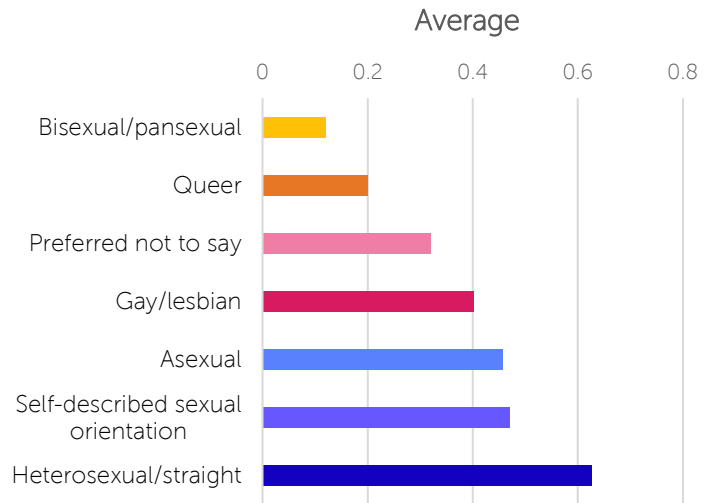
Part-time workers who volunteer are also nearly **four times** as likely to be meeting their Need for **Achievement** well, compared with non-volunteers who work part-time.

**“Volunteering in a mainstream school has greatly improved my sense of wellbeing.”**

## Wellbeing amongst bisexual or pansexual respondents

If we look at average wellbeing by sexuality over the span of a year (13<sup>th</sup> June 2022 to 13<sup>th</sup> June 2023), we can see that bisexual and pansexual respondents in Suffolk had the lowest average score of all groups.

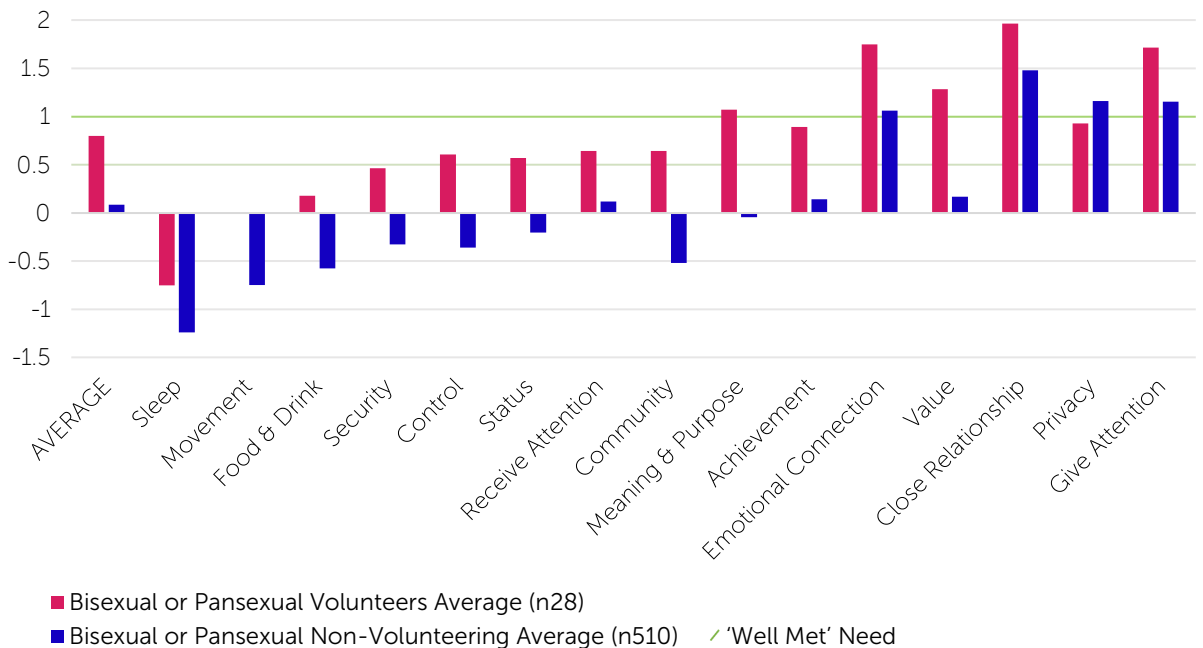
However, our data suggests that volunteering may help bisexual and pansexual respondents to better meet their Needs.



Much like the other demographic groups, **bisexual and pansexual respondents who volunteer** are more than three times as likely to be meeting their Needs well than bisexual or pansexual respondents who don't volunteer.

Bisexual and pansexual respondents who volunteer are nearly four times as likely to meet their Need for **Community** well, compared with their non-volunteering counterparts. Bisexual and pansexual respondents who volunteer are even meeting their Needs better, on average, than the average respondent who identified as heterosexual/straight (who are the most well group on average, when looking at wellbeing by sexuality).

Differences in wellbeing amongst Bisexual or Pansexual Respondents



## Key takeaways

- Volunteers are **twice** as likely to be meeting their Needs well than non-volunteers
- Volunteering can make us more likely to meet our Need for **Meaning & Purpose**, enabling us to contribute towards something bigger than ourselves
- Voluntary work may be particularly important for those not currently in employment or of retirement age, as individuals can **stay connected** to their community and meet their Need for **Achievement** outside of workplace environments
- Volunteering can also give you good sense of **Achievement** outside of your workplace, making part-time workers nearly **four times** as likely to be meeting this Need if they are also a volunteer.

## Interested in volunteering?

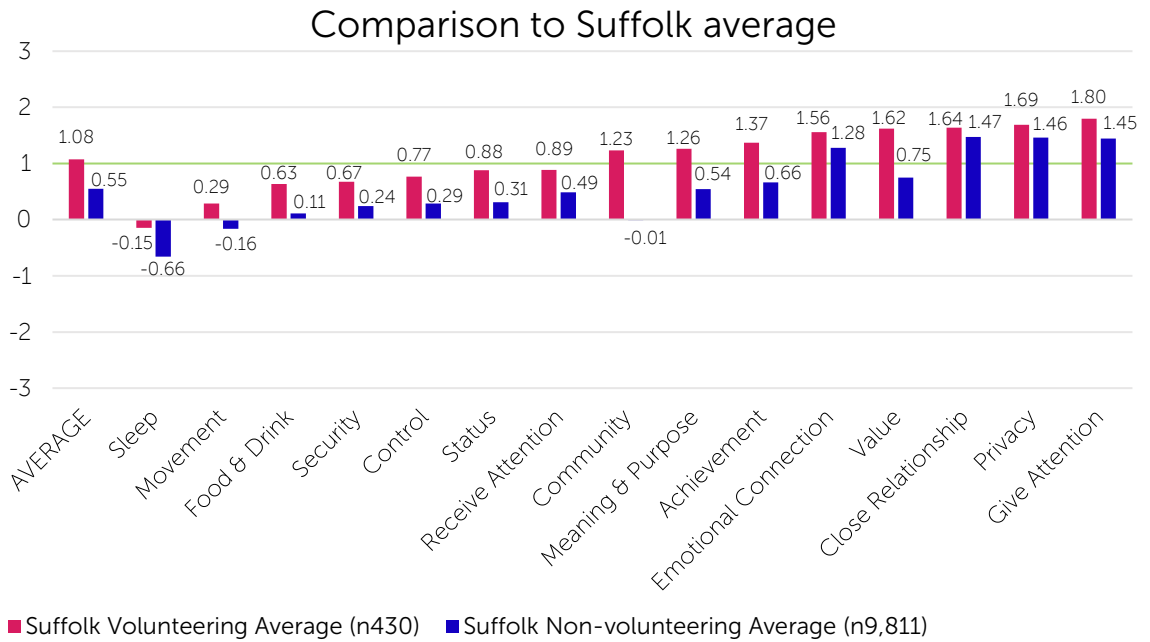
Please visit our website to view our volunteering vacancies:

[www.suffolkmind.org.uk/volunteering/](http://www.suffolkmind.org.uk/volunteering/)

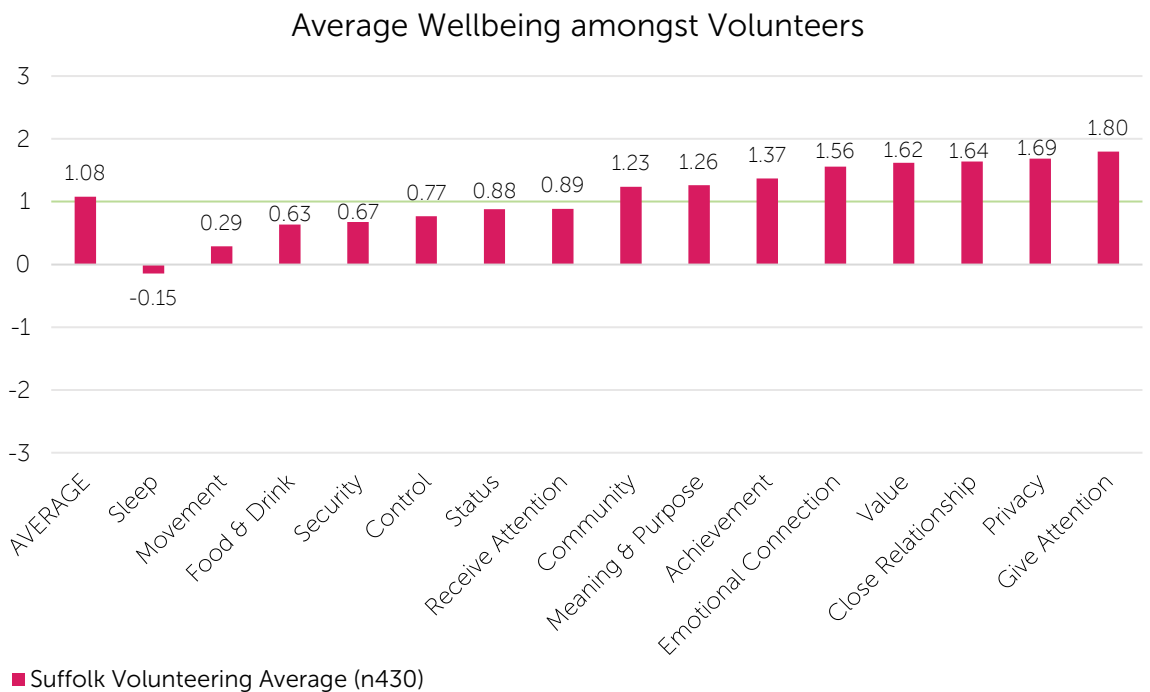




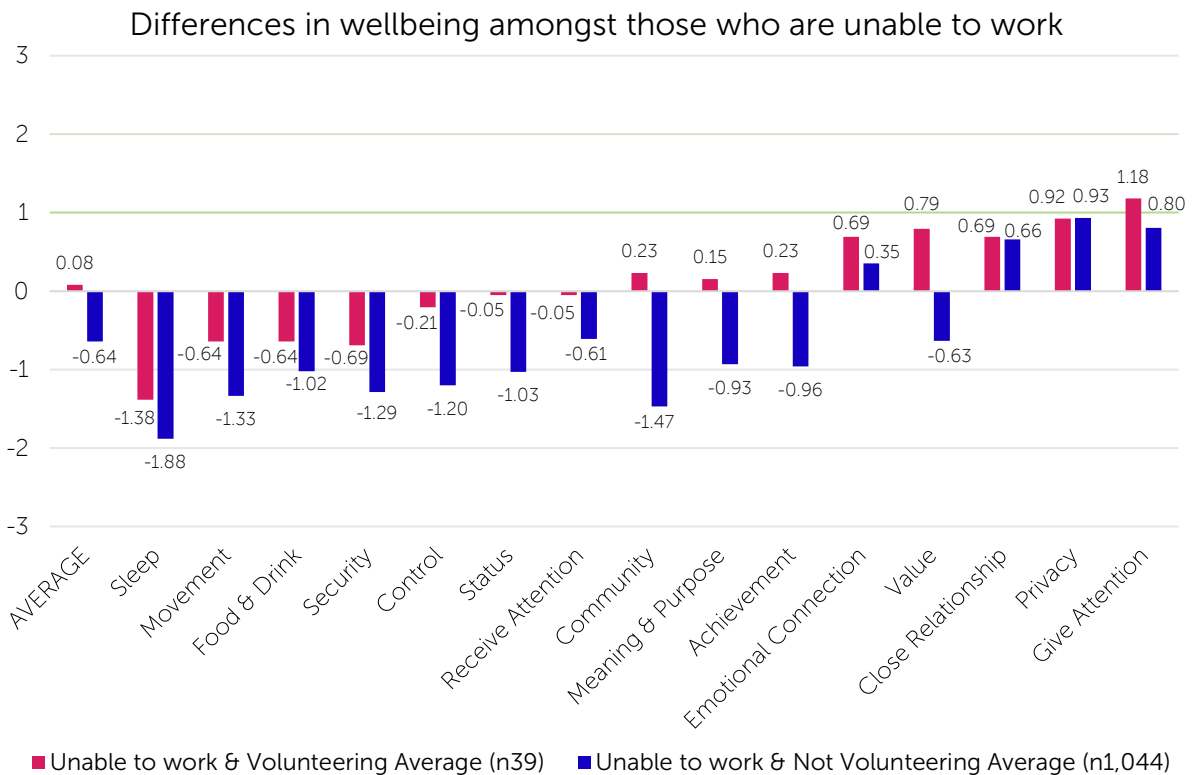
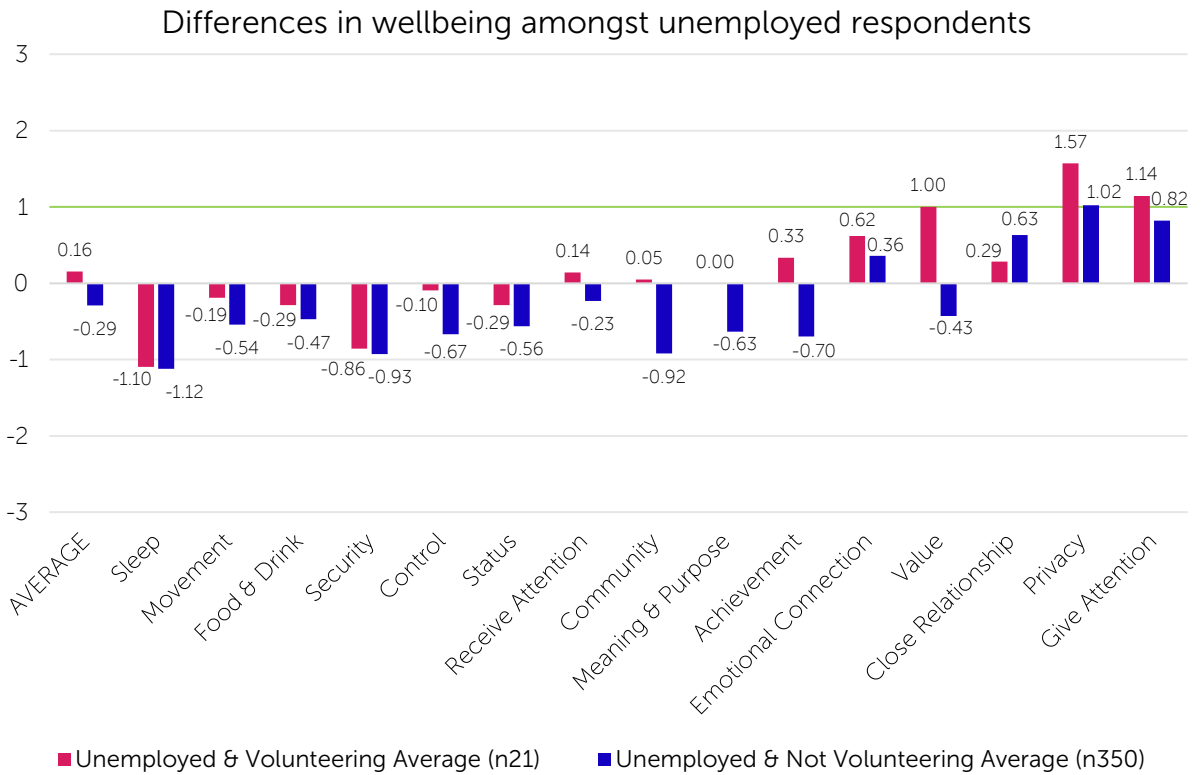
## Appendix 1 – Overall Graphs



*This graph shows average results, from the Emotional Needs Audit, of volunteers and non-volunteers in Suffolk. For an explanation of the graph, please see the Appendix. The Emotional Needs are along the bottom on the x axis, arranged from least to best met on average from left to right, with the average of all Needs combined on the far left. How well the Needs are met is shown on the y axis. Within the audit, each Need can be scored from -3 to 3, however, from this graph, we can see that the averages land between -1 and 2 (a view of the results on the full scale can be found in the Appendix).*

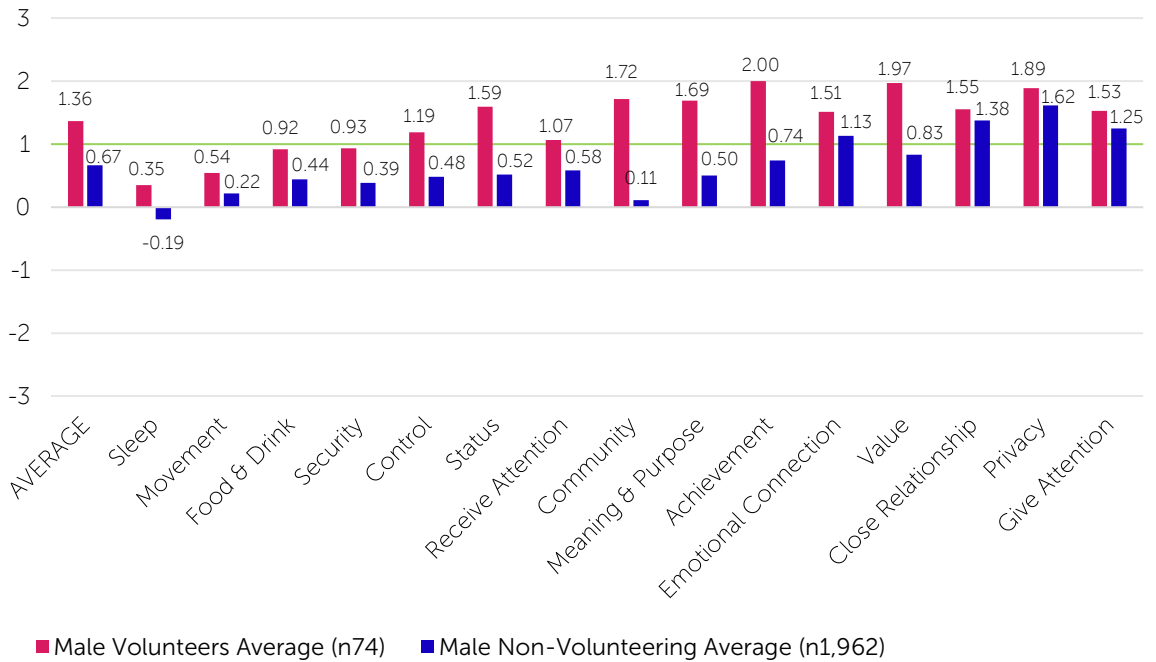


## Appendix 2 – Differences in wellbeing

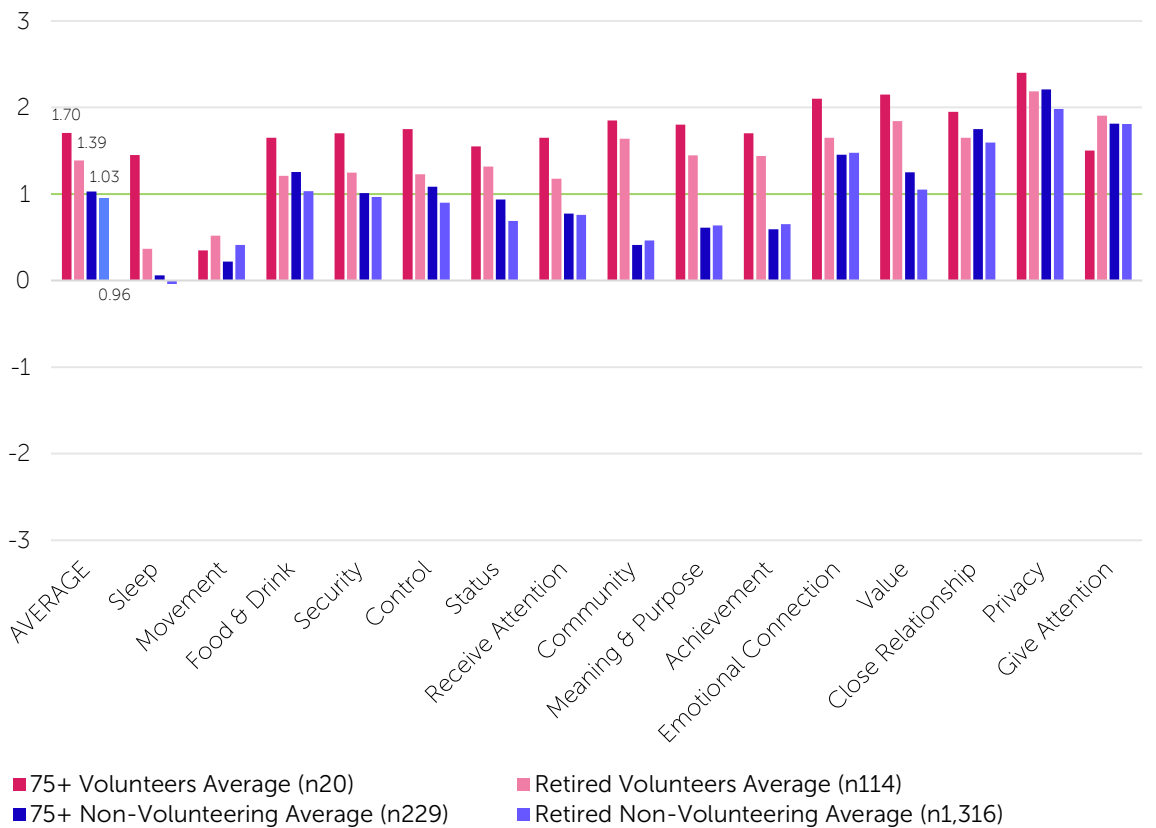


## Appendix 2 – Differences in wellbeing

Differences in wellbeing amongst Men

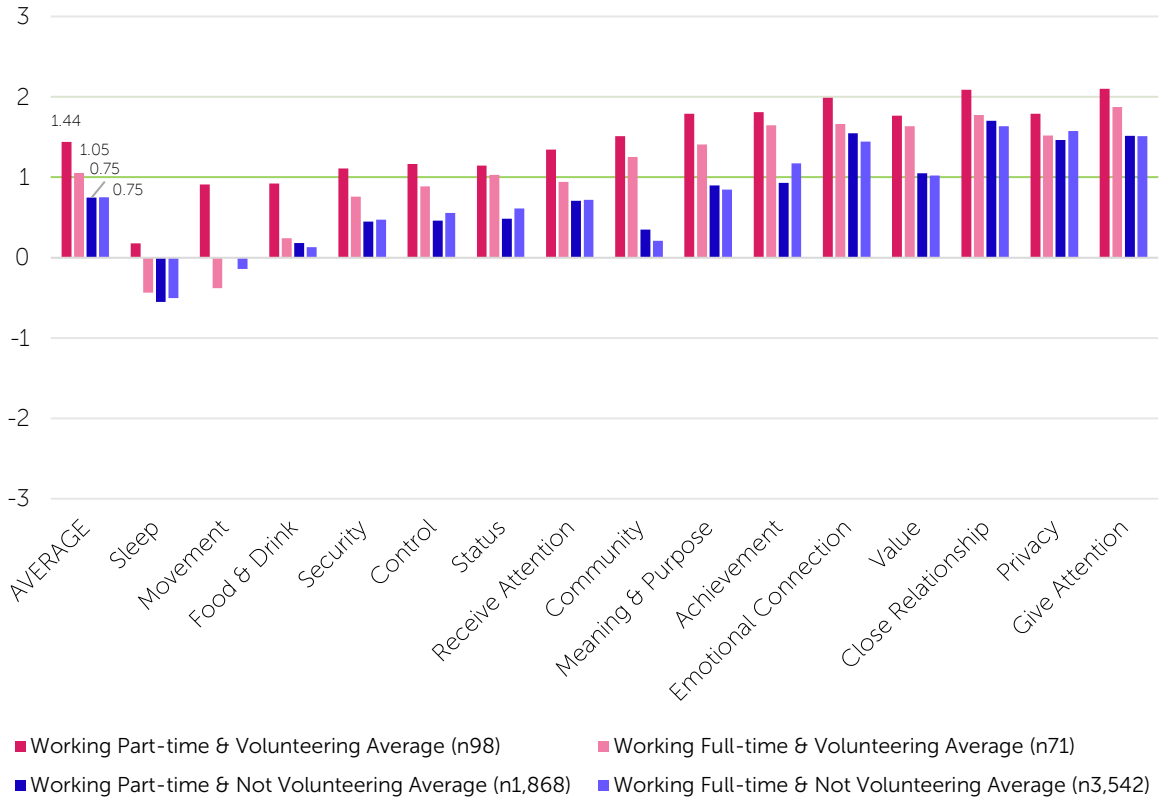


Differences in wellbeing amongst Retired Respondents

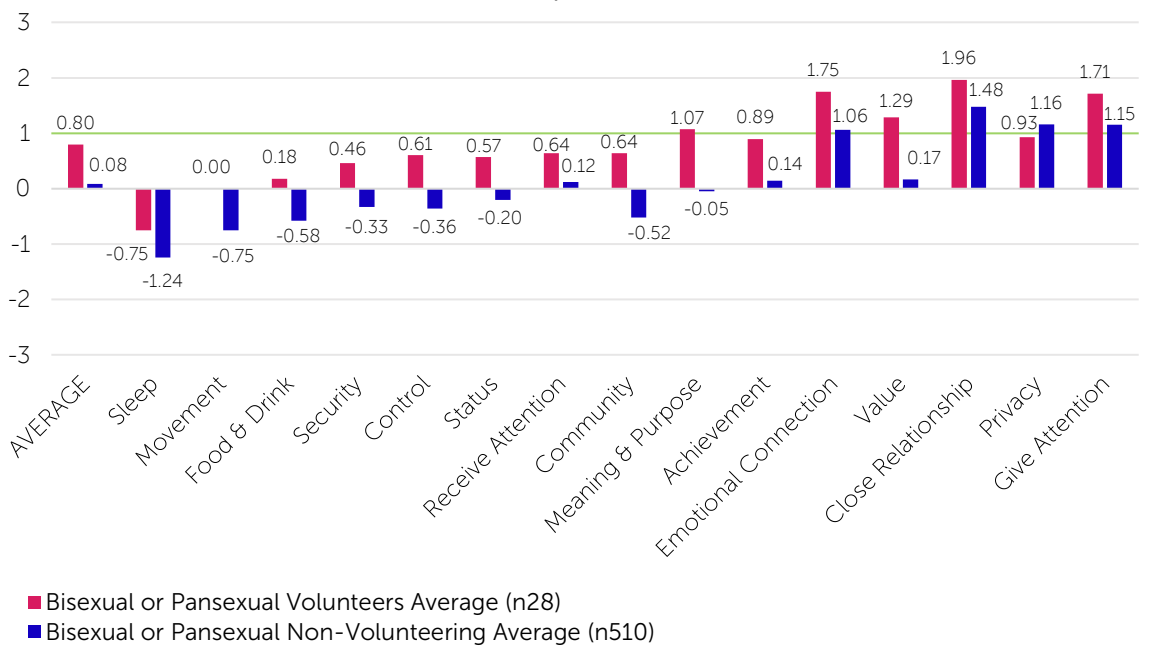


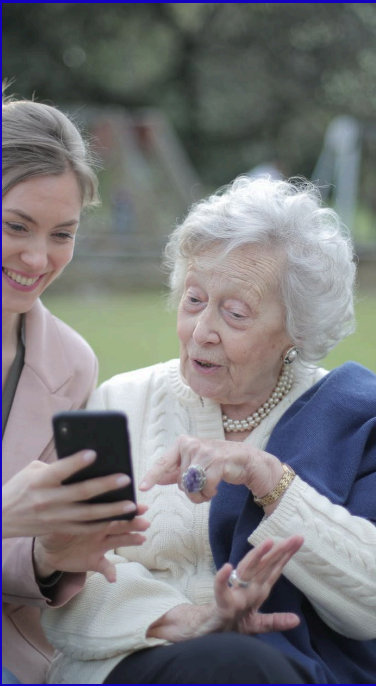
## Appendix 3 – Further Differences

Differences in wellbeing amongst Retired Respondents



Differences in wellbeing amongst Bisexual or Pansexual Respondents





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