

Guide to involving Young People as Volunteers

Here are some general tips and advice aimed at supporting young people and reducing barriers when involving younger volunteers.

Rethinking young people involved in volunteering

Young people can use their volunteering to increase their confidence, skill base & experience, reference base, social skills and other 'soft skills.' They may need a volunteering experience as a route to personal development or as an employability route to gain vital experience for increasing their job prospects or access to further education.

Your organisation could be **missing out** on the advantages of having young people involved who can bring their own fresh and youthful dynamic to the project.

Indeed, your project may be unintentionally discriminating against younger people volunteering.

So what do younger volunteers want exactly? Shorter term projects with more flexibility tend to be more popular. They may want to have more of a say in what they're doing and be able to move around between different areas. If you can organise something where your young volunteers can work with their friends or in groups, then you're more likely to keep them motivated for longer.

Sound hard?

We're not expecting organisations to go outside of their mandate to involve young people. It can be about involving young people in a role that suits the organisation, but the way you do it might be different. You might break up the volunteer role so it can be done in shorter lots. It's not about thinking of whole new roles for young people, but just adapting them.

The key to successful volunteer placements is matching interests to roles. Use the young person's interests as a spring board. If the young person has come to you, that's even better. Find out what attracted them to your organisation and what they want to get out of it. That's what makes a placement successful or not – if the young person is actually interested and you can maintain their motivation.

Top tips

If you've decided you can do more for encouraging young people to volunteer, consider the following...

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Promote the young person volunteering role

- Target areas where young people populate to advertise the volunteering role e.g. Young Scot, Princes Trust, JobcentrePlus, a local Young Person's Project etc
- Keep the language on the role straightforward and minimal
- Directly ask young people to volunteer as they may not feel wanted by projects e.g. 'volunteers wanted between 14-18 years of age
- Consult with young people, both in designing recruitment aspects for young volunteers and in any roles they may wish to take up or develop in your project
- Consider using IT technology e.g. social network sites, text services, etc to get into the world of young people.

Set clear role descriptions and expectations and adjust them with the young person if need be.

- Make the roles simple and achievable. Keep the roles within a young person's ability
- Give them training to improve on other roles within the project over time. Allow the young person to learn from mistakes
- Allow the volunteer role to be vibrant and fun where possible. Consider the volunteer role to be more flexible so that young people can access the times of the role i.e. flexibility in the 'time & commitment' aspect.

Manage and Support your young person volunteers

- Ensure that young people feel valued before they volunteer and during their volunteering
- Provide a more casual atmosphere towards young people in the work environment
- Designate a 'named' person to the young volunteer so they can relate to the project through that named person and build trust and respect through them
- Reward your young volunteers verbally or practically e.g. give them a regular monthly half hour appraisal; give them vouchers for the cinema, etc.

Always make clear the benefits of volunteering

- Use your in-house language to be encouraging
- Relate the volunteer role to improving employability aspects or as a personal development aspect.

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Give young people space to try out new and interesting things.

- Young people like to grow in progress, ensure your project can allow for expansion of their roles and potential new roles they can develop with assistance
- Link in with other projects where feasible to develop joint projects.

Team them up with other young volunteers!

- Are their friends interested too? Young People, particularly the 14–16 age group, are more likely not to shy away from volunteering if a friend can join them
- Local schools may be interested in a community project. Can your project accommodate and complete a 'Community Project' for a class or year group? Think about the benefits to your project, the school and the young people
- Older potential volunteers e.g. on Jobseekers Allowance could buddy up with a similar person in their situation to discover volunteering and how it can improve their employability. Why not discuss options with the Local Regeneration Agency or whoever may aid in development?

Need some new recruits?

Volunteer Centre Glasgow has some great information on best practice as well as tool kits and quick guides on evaluating volunteer programs, background checks and more. Get familiar and stay up to date on our website. The site includes general advice for organisations, links to helpful resources and 'how-to guides' on ensuring the best volunteering experience for your young people and the best outcomes for your organisation.

Age limits

In general, there is no lower age limit for volunteers. You may need to consider the type of role and responsibility that is appropriate for particular age groups.

Also consider if your project may be discriminating against a younger age group. Consider if the lower age group for the role is set too high and is there to discourage young people volunteering.

Your organisation's insurance (or other internal organisational policies) may stipulate an age limit. If so, read on.

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Young People and Volunteer Insurance

Your existing Public Liability or Employer's insurance policy does not have to be a barrier to involving young people. If the minimum age is not as low as you would like, then you can ask them to lower it, quite possibly at no or little cost. The following are some other insurances which may cover young people involved in your work.

Check if insurance:

- Can be covered by the young person's school. If in school permission from them or parent may be all that's needed;
- Is covered as part of a leadership program (such as the Duke of Edinburgh's Awards, Prince's Trust, etc);
- At your organisation has a lower age limit;

Students who are required to complete volunteering or community service are often covered by the school's work experience insurance. You will need to confirm this with the school.

Some pupils at school may have an Activity Coach through their 16+ Learning Choices resources provided by the Education Department. Their insurance may provide some assistance for cover.

Child Protection

Volunteering involving young people needs to take account of the Protection of Vulnerable Groups (PVG) (Scotland) Act 2007 and the new PVG legislation which comes into force in early 2011. Make sure that your organisation is operating within the requirements of the law. If you are unsure of your obligations, contact [CRBS](#). If you wish guidance on risk management of volunteers generally contact our [Training Officer](#).

Young volunteer checklist... overleaf

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Young volunteer checklist

Your organisation may seek to:

- Rethink your structures so that they are more inclusive of the potential of young people volunteering
- Existing age limits for volunteering- are they discriminating against young people?
- Adjust your insurance policy to be inclusive of younger volunteers
- Consider which roles are appropriate for young people:
 - It may be a role where young people are working in a small team and/or assisting an older volunteer with a particular task.
 - Have a buddy system—this will mean that young volunteers are not left on their own during their volunteer role.
 - Younger volunteers can also be involved in running an awareness project at their school or assist at an event.
- Review your risk management strategy to ensure it considers duty of care and safety of young volunteers
- Get parental permission for volunteers under 16 years old.
- Involve the parent/guardian in the volunteer role (for younger volunteers)
- Provide your young volunteers with a recognised award.