GOOD PRACTICE GUIDELINES FOR ENGAGING YOUNG PEOPLE IN VOLUNTEERING

Voluntary Action North Lincolnshire
Advancing local voluntary action
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Thinking of involving young volunteers?
Would you like to start encouraging more young people into your organisation but feel that you wouldn’t know how to support them, or don’t really know what you would or could give them to do?

There is still the perception that young people may not have the skills, maturity or experience to get involved in volunteering activities, however young volunteers can bring a whole new dimension and energy to your organisation.

Many age 16 – 17 year olds find it really difficult to find an organisation that is willing to take them on, so if you are wondering how you can broaden your volunteer recruitment drive, then you may wish to consider the following points.

- There is no legal reason why a young people age 16 and 17 years cannot volunteer, however children are classed as a ‘vulnerable group’, so any organisation who takes on young volunteers must be careful to protect them. Legally a child is defined as someone who is under 18 years old, or under 16 if employed.

- Organisations with volunteer roles where young people would not be supervised all the time or may have to do something risky may not be happy taking them on, but there are plenty of roles that are safe and suitable and many people under 18 to do.

- Organisations need to carry out risk assessments to decide whether placing a young person in a volunteer role would put them, or the people they’re working with, at risk, and may wish to follow some basic principles
  - Young people should not be left unattended
  - Young volunteers should be supervised by two or more adults
  - Any potentially dangerous activity should have constant adult supervision.

Organisations should also be aware that insurance cover (public or employer liability) does not automatically cover people under 16, so it is important to check that there is no lower age limit in your policy. It is normally easy to extend the policy to cover young people, but occasionally the insurance company may decide that because of the type of work involved, the risk of involving young people would be too high.

It is a very good idea to obtain parental/guardian consent for volunteers under 16. When giving a consent form to a volunteer, also consider providing a volunteer role description and publicity leaflets about your organisation. This will help the volunteer’s parent/guardian understand what your organisation does, what the young person will be doing, and when and where they will be working.

Further information
- The Children's Legal Centre (CLC)
- CLC ‘Frequently asked question’ and answer on parental responsibility
- Volunteering England Good Practice Bank Theme ‘Youth Volunteering’

Taken from ‘Volunteer England Information Sheet 2011 – Who is allowed to volunteer’

Involving young people as volunteers
Suitable roles are those that are not tedious, but incorporate activities that interest young people today. If a young person takes on an admin role, for example, try to avoid things like masses of photocopying, putting labels on envelopes etc, and utilise skills such as IT and Media skills.

A young person may be able to help staff and clients to use their mobile phones better, set up or update a website (don’t forget that you will need to continue to do this when they leave, so ask them to create a guide to help you do this when they move on). They may set up social networking sites for your organisation such as Facebook or Twitter, or do some internet research for you. Perhaps they could have a look at all those tired old leaflets and give them a bright fresh appealing new look?

Roles that are unsuitable for young people can include:

- Driving
- Working heavy equipment
- Roles where they would be working alongside people who have not had DBS checks, or who you know are not ‘young person friendly’, however this is also a time for older volunteers/staff to develop their attitudes and get to know and understand young people better. DBS checks are a must though, and regular monitoring of staff who supervise young people – we all know that a police check is only a snapshot of a person’s history, and not always the full story!
- Anything that puts them in a vulnerable situation, perhaps when they are working in isolation.
- No lone working – don’t put a young person in a situation where they could be at risk of harm themselves, or could put others at risk of harm.

Get to know the young person – everyone develops at a different rate, some people have a more mature attitude and understanding of their environment than others. Bear this in mind when giving a young person a job to do.

- Did they understand the instructions you gave? (you could give them a notebook and ask them to make their own notes, and then oversee the work until you are confident that they understand their duties)

- Did they say they understood because they were afraid of saying they didn’t?

- Do they know that they can ask questions at any time, and as many times as they want to?

- Do they know that it is ok to fail or make a mistake? And that it’s all part of the way we learn.

It is better to give clear verbal and possibly written instructions and then to monitor progress then it is to leave a young person in a situation where they could ‘make a mess’ and lose their confidence. Volunteering is all about developing skills and increasing your confidence isn’t it!

**Barriers to volunteering**

There are many ways to break down barriers so that young people can get involved in volunteering.

**Time – or rather the lack of it!**

Organisations may need to be adaptable regarding times and be prepared to tailor the time and commitment to young people.
• Think about offering opportunities after school/college, at weekends, during half terms and holidays.

• Be aware of exam times as young people will need time to revise.

• Could you offer ‘quiet space’ in your office where young people can come to study after school or college?

• Young people looking for work may need to be flexible if they have to go for a job interview or have time to do job searches. Perhaps they could do this during their volunteer hours?

Flexibility is the key both to engage and retain young volunteers.

**Loss of ‘spare time’**

If a young person has a number of commitments including a job (part time or full time) and is also studying, has family commitments and a social life, could they just fit in a couple of hours volunteering each week/fortnight?

Short term opportunities could be the answer as these could take place during a young person’s leisure time – make sure opportunities are fun and appealing – after all, who wants to give up their precious leisure time to be bored?

**Cost – to self – travel etc.**

Reimbursement of expenses is good practice for any volunteer involving organisation so make that very clear from the outset. Volunteers should not be out of pocket. If you are able to pay for lunches etc, that would be an extra incentive.
If young people are living at home and supported by their parents then cost may not always be such an important consideration, but if they are living independently, possibly living on a very small income, then any out of pocket expense such as bus fare, petrol or lunch may exclude them from the valuable experience of volunteering.

If you are setting up a new volunteer programme, make sure you include volunteer expenses in any funding application. Some volunteers don’t claim their expenses – often older, more financially able people, however you need to be realistic and assume all young people will claim theirs.

Expenses must be offered to everyone, even those that may not need it or say they do not want it. This makes it fair and also ensures that those who do claim don’t feel embarrassed about doing so. You could approach local business’ to try to secure funding for volunteer expenses. It would be great publicity for them to be funding young people who are giving something back to their community. They may sponsor one young person through their volunteering ‘life’.

**Information – too confusing, too complicated**

Make sure your publicity says what you want from a volunteer and why you want them. Make it very clear how they go about getting more information or becoming involved. If possible, enlist the help of young people in designing your publicity or at least ask them their opinion before distribution. Once on board, make sure young volunteers know exactly what is expected of them by having clear, concise task descriptions.
Benefits – not clear about the benefits that could be gained by volunteering

This is where you really score and it is your big selling point. The benefits are numerous; learning and building new skills, good to put on a CV, gaining experience, possible references, socialising and networking. Don’t rely on others to pass this on. Go into school, college, attend volunteer fairs and do it yourself with passion!

Confidence – Not sure they could do it!

Give examples to young people of how they can boost their confidence whilst volunteering with your organisation. Ensure you provide experiences that will enable this to take place.

Benefits – Impact on benefits

Get information from the Job Centre so that you make sure you are passing on the right information regarding benefits and volunteering. That also goes for what you expenses you pay.

Perceptions – it will be just like school: no choice, not being involved or being consulted, boring, not fun!

It is up to you to dispel all of these myths, but you need to ensure your opportunities are not boring and that your young volunteers can have fun!

Parents might be against it

This may certainly be a problem amongst families who object to ‘giving something for nothing’ and you may
have to sell the benefits to the parents as well as the young people. Children of parents already volunteering will know this already. You could produce a leaflet for parents, or ask a young volunteer to create one!

**Peer pressure – what their mates might think**

This is not always a barrier identified by many young people, it is probably more our perception of their barriers. Involving young volunteers is a great way of involving more young people if they have a good experience. When other young people see their mates having a good time, being rewarded and having an ‘edge’ when it comes to job opportunities, they may try it themselves!

**Acceptance – organisations’ attitude to young volunteers – existing volunteers and staffs’ attitude to young volunteers**

Only you as the organisation can ensure that young people are welcomed and accepted as volunteers. Get this right before you start to recruit. As ‘word of mouth’ is the biggest way that young people get into volunteering, it could also be the biggest form of bad publicity if you get it wrong. Do some training with your existing staff and volunteers so they know and buy into the reasons for recruiting young people. Sell them the benefits, by sensitive to their concerns, but be firm. It is your responsibility to make sure this works from both sides.

As with all barriers you have to work hard to break them down. It cannot be done sitting in an office. The key factors to reducing barriers to volunteering for young people are using the young people themselves to ‘sell’ the idea. And
get the publicity right. Get out and talk to young people. Badger the local press and local radio to run ‘good news’ stories around youth volunteering. Keep on and on chipping away at the barriers until they start to crumble.

When embarking on involving young people as volunteers, stand in their shoes for a while.

Think – when can they volunteer and how much time can they give and work backwards from there.

Develop roles specifically for them:

- Holiday opportunities
- Short term opportunities – dip in and out of such as clean ups projects, events etc
- Activities linked to sport
- Activities linked to the environment
- Weekend activities – fun clubs for disabled children, fund raisers, fashion shows, fun days..... sponsored mountain climb?

**Good beginnings**

- Thorough induction training is vital – this way the young person will know exactly what they have to do, what they cannot do, who they report to, what expenses they can claim, what paperwork is involved, whether they are insured or not and what supervision they can expect. Consider doing this in various ways – group training, self study, workbook, buddying etc.
• They should have a named person who they can contact if they have any concerns and that person should contact them regularly especially in the early days to check that everything is ok.

• Do you have a dress code? You should share this with your young volunteers to save any embarrassment in the future.

**Ways to say thank you**

• Acknowledging their input

• Thanking them – both privately and publicly

• Rewarding them – both privately and publicly – you could hold a yearly gala prom around Volunteers Week. If you do this already for your volunteers, then make sure you include any young people that have volunteered with you over the year.

• Training relevant to their role and their future aspirations

• Giving certificates for any training or achievements

• Sending birthday/Christmas cards

**Identify why interest may be lost**

• The work could be boring. Some volunteer roles are tedious. They may have been doing it too long and need a break

• Not getting on with people they are involved with

• Their personal life has changed – got a part time job, boy/girlfriend

• Personal life changes at home

**Ways to keep interest and involvement going**

• Look at ways to inject interest and change

• Develop new roles and ask current volunteers to be part of the innovation

• If group dynamics is a problem change the group
Managing de-motivation

- Make sure you spot it early so that you can act
- Offer a change of role
- Offer a break
- Acknowledge that things change and sometimes we need to move on – help them to find other roles or just support them to stop volunteering. They are more likely to come back to volunteering if they have left in a positive way
- Keep in touch – let them know what is going on, ask them if ever you need one-off help with something like fundraising or an event. Ask them back to any social events.

Future plan

- Consult young people about the future of the organisation
- If running a pilot let them help to deliver it if appropriate
- Encourage them to sit on the Management Committee
- Take them to consultation meetings and networking events
- Involve them.

Policies and Procedures:

- Volunteer policy
- Equal opportunities and diversity policy
- Safeguarding policy
- Adult protection
- Health & Safety
- Lone Working
- Complaints Procedure
It will depend on the individual organisations’ policy whether or not they need adapting when including young volunteers.

There is no legislation governing the volunteering by children and young people under the age of 16 years old. However the law of duty of care which all adults are obliged to observe is automatically in operation.

Health and Safety should be applied and vigorous Risk Assessments carried out for all situations where young people are going to be volunteering.

For more information, advice and guidance regarding young people and volunteering, please contact:

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