

NORTH OF TYNE VOLUNTEERING AREA OF EXCELLENCE

10 TOP TIPS FOR ENGAGING YOUNG VOLUNTEERS

Many volunteer roles are currently restricted to volunteers aged 18 and over. In some cases, this is necessary due to the nature of the role. However, there is great benefit in engaging young volunteers as part of your organisation's work, and volunteering can play a wonderful role in a young person's development.

ALIGNMENT WITH THE HEALTH CHECK FOR VOLUNTEER-INVOLVING ORGANISATIONS

The Health Check for Volunteer-Involving Organisations considers the extent to which you are able to recruit more volunteers to join your organisation and the extent to which you involve volunteers in meaningful ways that reflect their abilities and needs.

The following tips are provided to help you think through how best to engage under-18 volunteers as part of your organisation's work, and to break down some of the barriers that may be standing in the way. We hope that you find them helpful:

1. Reap the benefits for your organisation

Young people often see the world differently. By engaging young volunteers in your organisation's work, you may find your volunteers bringing unique perspectives, ideas or skills which could lead to meaningful change. Some roles, like social media marketing and raising awareness of the organisation, are especially suited to the skills and motivations of younger people. Involving young people means your organisation can better reflect the diversity of the local community and reach new networks through your young volunteers. Also, wouldn't you love it if these young people were so enthusiastic about your organisation's work that they became long-term volunteers, supporters or even staff members down the line?

2. Recognise the benefits to the young person

We all want our volunteer programmes to be mutually beneficial and there is great potential for volunteering to play a vital role in the development of a young person. Whether it is growing their confidence, giving them real-world experience in their interests or potential career path, or enabling them to get out of the house to support a cause they care about and make friends, the benefits to the young person are a wonderful extension of the already-valuable work your organisation is doing. As well as personal development, the young person can also be given the opportunity to shape and deliver services and have an impact on the organisation and the world.

3. Review the timings of your roles

Many young people are committed to school, college or other activities, and may find it difficult to commit to long-term roles. Consider short-term, summer holiday, home-based, family volunteering, micro-volunteering or flexible opportunities where possible. A good example of an opportunity designed to suit young people's availability is the Saturday Young Volunteers Club at Recyke y'Bike. This group engages young people using bikes to grow confidence, self-esteem, interpersonal and mechanical skills. Running this at the weekend enables more young people to attend as well as the provision of appropriate support for the young volunteers, and it has been a very popular activity so far!



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4. Target recruitment and respond to enquiries promptly

It's important to think about how and where you will recruit to your roles. Consider digital and physical venues which young people frequent: social media, youth centres, schools and colleges. Do the publicity materials you use reflect the diversity of the population you're hoping to attract? You could involve a young person in the design process to make your publicity more effective. For a young person looking to volunteer, they want to know that their commitment is valued. It is really important that you respond to a young volunteer as quickly as possible, as this will help to maintain their enthusiasm for becoming a volunteer and joining your organisation.

5. Consider how best to support the young person

Think back to the first job interview or volunteer application you had. How did you feel? There will be lots of things that are new to the young person, not only during the application phase but also once they get started. What support can you put in place to help the young person do their best? Sending information in advance to help shape their expectations, or using a buddy system with someone a bit more experienced in the role are some possible options. You could offer the opportunity for the young person to volunteer alongside their family or friends, gaining multiple volunteers at the same time. It is also good to offer the volunteer the chance to provide feedback and to disclose any additional support they would like, both before and after they start the role.

6. Celebrate commitment and achievement

It is good to recognise the commitment that all volunteers make, but for a young volunteer, it may be all the more special for them to know how much their contribution has meant. Could you prepare a volunteer certificate for them to display at home, particularly during Volunteers' Week? How about a personal thank-you card? Some organisations organise team socials, volunteer awards or a celebration event to recognise the contribution of volunteers.

7. Pay expenses up front where possible

For young people without a regular income, being able to cover their expenses up front could make all the difference to them being able to volunteer. Many organisations already have an expenses policy in place, but could you set aside a small amount of that budget to cover the volunteer's travel expenses in advance, by providing a prepaid bus pass or cash towards their next travel ticket?

8. Provide the opportunity to try out a variety of tasks

At this stage of their lives where they are making decisions about what to study or where to work, what opportunities can you provide the young person to get experience in different areas and find out where their real passion lies? As they get familiar with their role, could you give them opportunities to chat with people working or volunteering in other areas of the organisation, or to shadow a volunteer in a different area? If you are a larger organisation, could you have a senior staff member come to meet your younger volunteers, to bring encouragement all around?



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9. Check your legal and ethical obligations

It is important that all volunteers are kept safe and covered by insurance, so you should check that young volunteers are mentioned on your insurance policy and explain to your young volunteers what is and isn't covered by insurance. It is good practice to consider the guidance on times of day and number of hours that the Working Time Regulations (1998) give for employment of young people and to gain parental consent or a parent's endorsement of their application where appropriate. It is also important to put together a Safeguarding Policy and risk assessment to minimise the risk of harm to young volunteers. Involving young volunteers in writing the risk assessment can be beneficial at increasing their awareness of potential dangers and their sense of ownership too! Considering the potential emotional impact of the role on the young person and being clear regarding code of conduct and professional boundaries are also important in providing a safe, enjoyable volunteering experience for the young person.

10. Help the young people set goals and reflect on their improvement

Goals are a great way to motivate young people to grow in their role and their personal development. When the volunteer joins, you could work with them to set goals that both support your organisation's objectives and excite the volunteer about what is possible during the time they spend volunteering with you. You could also encourage and help them to see and reflect on the progress they make during their volunteering and the wider impact this has on society.

WE'RE HERE IF YOU NEED SUPPORT

In the North of Tyne Volunteering Area of Excellence, we see a big opportunity for organisations to expand their volunteer roles to include younger volunteers, and we are passionate about being part of the change to make that happen. We regularly receive enquiries about roles for under-18 year olds and we would love to be part of the development of many more roles to satisfy this demand.

If you have any questions about engaging younger volunteers in your organisation's work, or would benefit from a meeting to discuss this, or from more focused developmental support, we are here to help you!

Newcastle Volunteer Centre - karen.watson@volunteeringmatters.org.uk

North Tyneside Volunteer Centre - volunteering@voda.org.uk

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