

#youth #VIP



Young People's Perspectives on Volunteering

Research report

Delivered by:



Scottish Government
Riaghaltas na h-Alba
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Introduction



#YouthVIP is a multi-organisation initiative which aims to promote inclusive and participatory youth volunteering across Scotland. The consortium comprises Young Scot, Volunteering Matters and YouthLink Scotland. As part of this work, the initiative supports a panel of young people which meets to make recommendations and take action nationally and in their own communities to improve the volunteering landscape in Scotland.

The #YouthVIP project and this research in particular contribute to the ambitions of incorporating volunteer ‘voice’ within the [Volunteering Action Plan](#), offering perspectives from young people to inform decision-making and practice both on the ground and strategically.

It is understood that getting involved in volunteering during childhood or youth makes it more likely that someone will volunteer in adulthood. In the current context of dropping volunteering rates [1] within the adult population in Scotland, it is essential that we get volunteering right for young people so that they and society can gain the benefits of their volunteering, now and in the future.

In 2024-2025 we undertook a research project to create a picture of how youth volunteering in Scotland currently looks; who is volunteering and why, barriers preventing young people accessing volunteering opportunities, and what can be done to make volunteering opportunities more inclusive, appealing and rewarding for all. Our research approach, collaboratively developed and supported at all times by the #YouthVIP panel, employed both surveys and focus groups to gather in-depth qualitative and quantitative data.

Key findings suggest a mixed volunteering experience across Scotland, where many young people are motivated by skills development, CV building, and community contribution. However, significant barriers persist, including poor communication, logistical challenges such as transport, time constraints, and a lack of interesting and appealing roles.

The report highlights that young people want volunteering that is engaging, well-communicated, flexible, and rewarding. They seek opportunities that are social, supportive, and accessible. With strong recommendations focusing on improving communication of volunteering roles and the expectations that come with it, flexibility, and more interesting opportunities, this report lays the groundwork for action aimed at increasing participation and inclusivity in youth volunteering across Scotland.

[1] Current state of Scottish Volunteering, Volunteer Scotland. <https://www.volunteerscotland.net/research-evaluation/research-publications/the-current-state-of-scottish-volunteering>

What we did

In September – December 2018 a short survey designed by an earlier iteration of the #YouthVIP panel asked young people across Scotland questions on accessing volunteering, the benefits from volunteering, and the barriers which had been experienced. In summer 2024 the current #YouthVIP panel chose to refresh this earlier survey, adding new questions and refining others, yet keeping closely aligned with the core themes of the programme.

The Young Scot Data & Insights team worked with the panel to develop the 2024 survey. This included setting the key themes for the survey and identifying which questions from the previous version to include, as well as creating new questions.

After receiving the results of the survey, YouthLink Scotland worked collaboratively with #YouthVIP panel members to examine which themes and aspects they wanted to explore in more detail through the method of focus groups. Particular demographic groups that weren't well represented in the survey were highlighted and whilst acknowledging not all target groups could be covered in the focus groups, panel members made a priority list to capture as many as they could.

#YouthVIP panel members helped shape the content of these focus groups and reflected on what worked well and what themes to focus on, and the panel members also then co-facilitated the focus groups. Focus groups led by young people for young people enabled us to build a safe and trusting atmosphere that promoted open dialogue. We used active listening and implemented creative, participatory approaches to engage the young people taking part. The panel members and supporting staff worked with the Senior Researcher from YouthLink Scotland to develop a topic guide for the focus group, consent forms, and information sheets to share with the young people and their parents/guardians. The Senior Researcher also provided panel members and supporting staff with clear instructions in how to safely and securely share the audio file to arrange transcriptions by an approved and experienced transcriber.

Panel members involved in shaping and/or facilitating the focus groups were invited to take part in a coding and reflection day facilitated by the Senior Researcher. Throughout the day the panel members were supported and guided in how to code the data (pull out the key themes) and reflect on the key findings that were emerging, and to compare the experience of the different focus groups, as well as linking to the supporting data from the survey. The following report is based on the survey findings and analysis of the focus groups.

This project adhered to the ethical principles outlined in YouthLink Scotland's research ethics policy. The policy can be found at:

[YouthLink Scotland website](#)

Who took part?

This 2024 Youth Volunteering in Scotland survey was open for responses from 10th October to 8th December 2024. 436 completed responses were received.

The Survey was promoted to young people through: Young Scot's volunteer network; the Young Scot Membership platform; social media posts aimed at partnership organisations on Twitter/X; LinkedIn; Threads; Facebook; BlueSky. Survey links were shared across practitioner networks by YouthLink Scotland and Volunteering Matters to reach young people through youth workers, volunteer involving organisations and Volunteer Centres/ Third Sector Interfaces. Posts were created and shared directly with young people using promoted posts on Instagram and Snapchat. Youth VIP panel members also shared created content to raise awareness. An incentive of a draw for four sets of £25 LovetoShop vouchers was offered.

Demographics of respondents

463 respondents

65% female **28%** male

68% white / white Scottish / white British **8%** asian

24% reported a long-term illness or disability

28% had experience of being a young carer

10% had experience of being in care

The majority of respondents were aged 14 (15%); 15 (16%); 17(18%) and 17(13%)
23% of postcodes given were in the most deprived SIMD quintile; 19% in the second most deprived.

46% of respondents lived in large urban areas and 27% in other urban areas.
Respondents came from all 32 local authority areas in Scotland. Glasgow had the highest number at 70 (16%) and the Shetland Isles the lowest number at 1 (0%)

Focus Groups – Who took part and why we identified them?

Demographic gaps and those voices that were underrepresented in the survey were specifically targeted when setting up the focus groups, to try and get a wide range we carried out 4 focus groups in total. 2 of these were in-person sessions, taking place in Dundee and South Ayrshire, and 2 online sessions were held with groups of young people from Shetland and Dumfries and Galloway.

Hot Chocolate Trust Dundee

3 young males took part, all aged 17. Young males were very underrepresented in the survey responses at only 27% so we wanted to ensure their voices were heard. Also, Dundee as one of the larger cities in Scotland only made up 2% of survey respondents, so this focus group met both those demographic imbalances. All 3 young males who took part identified themselves as having little or no volunteering experience and we thought it very important to capture why some young people don't volunteer as well as those who do.



Shetland Council

4 young people took part aged between 14-15, comprising of 3 males and 1 female. This group was targeted as there was only one survey response from Shetland and a very low response from the Island communities generally.

Dumfries and Galloway Council

8 young females took part aged between 18 – 24. We wanted to ensure young people living in rural communities were represented in these focus groups as the challenges of living rurally can impact their experiences of volunteering, and Dumfries and Galloway is a great representation of a large local authority which can have towns and villages extremely far apart.

South Ayrshire Council

7 young people took part aged between 15-16, comprising of 3 males and 4 females. This group was split in terms of having volunteering experience and not, and this dialogue between a mixed group was something we were keen to capture.

Findings

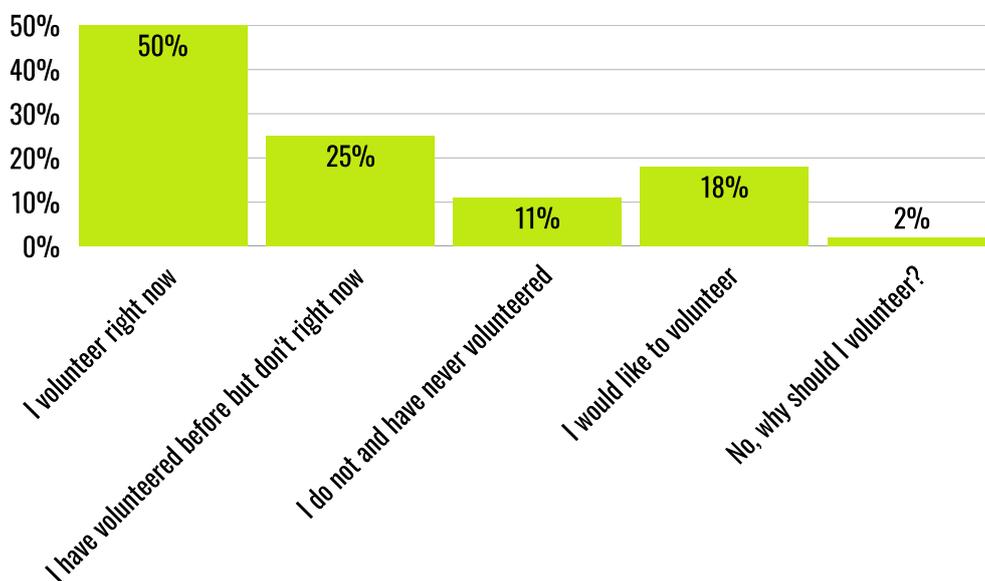


Youth volunteering landscape across Scotland

Our research aimed to gather data and information to give us a better understanding of youth volunteering across Scotland, what was working well, what the barriers were, and what could be done to improve the volunteering infrastructure and opportunities provided to and for young people.

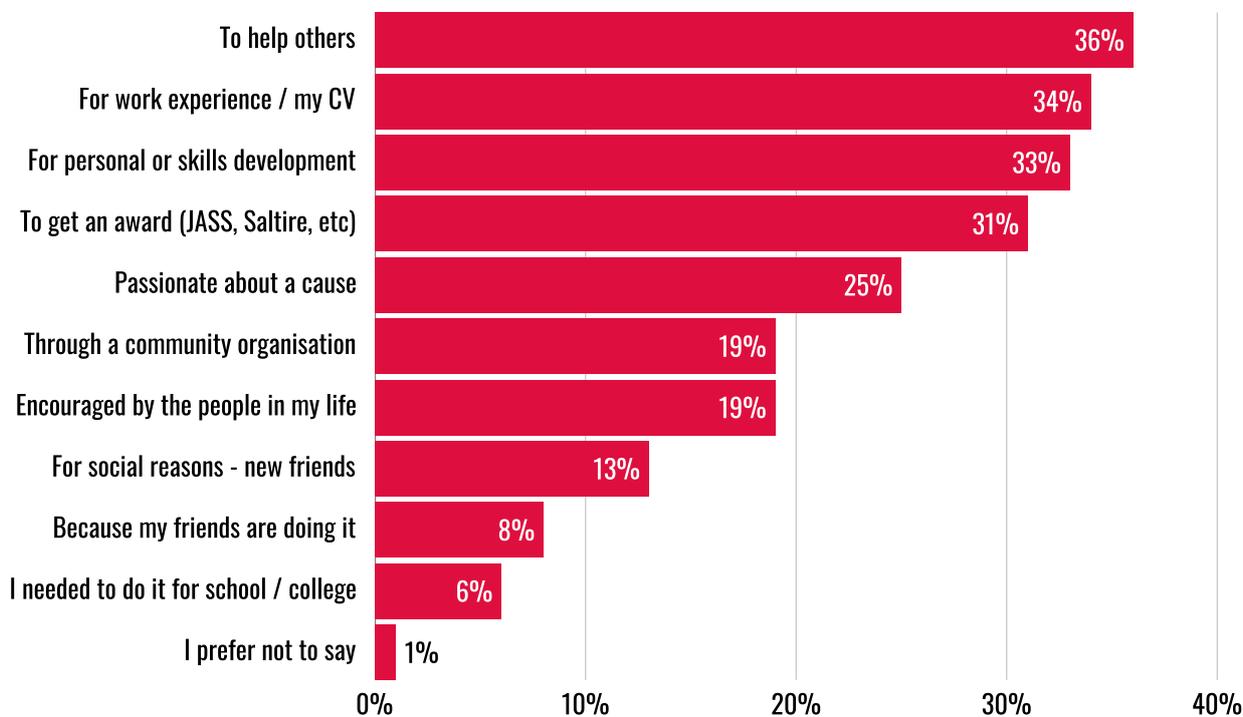
We firstly explored the current youth volunteering landscape in Scotland, the reach volunteering currently has to young people and why/how they get involved.

The survey found 50% of respondents were active volunteers, 25% had volunteered before but didn't currently and 18% of those who haven't volunteered before would like to:



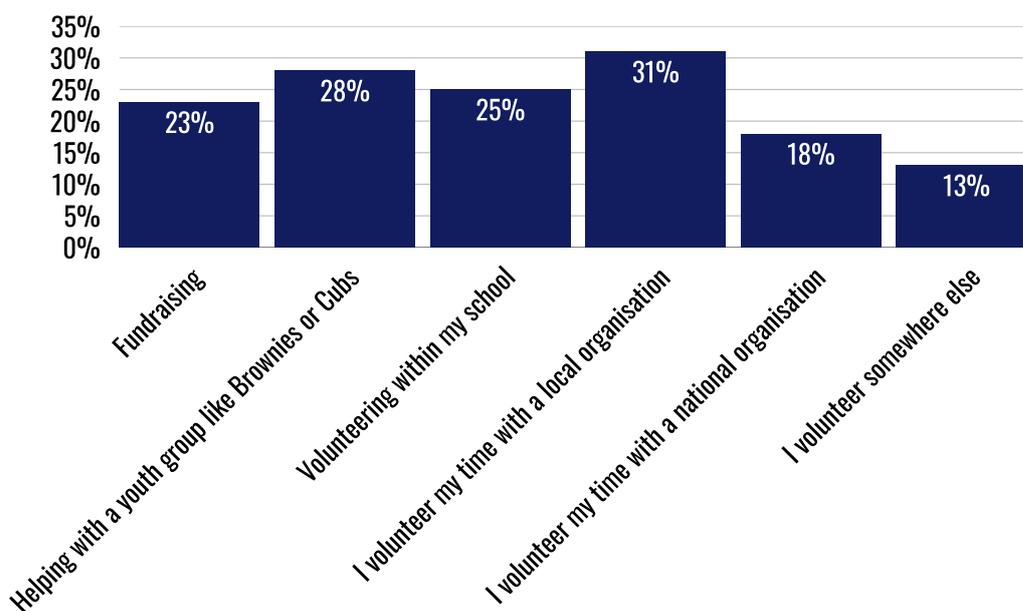
The most common ages young people had started volunteering tended to be 14 (18%) or 15 (17%).

The most popular reasons for having started volunteering were to help others (36%); for work experience (34%); for personal or skills development (33%) or to get an award (31%):



316 responses were received.

Of the young people who currently volunteered or had previously done so, we also asked what kinds of volunteering they had taken part in. Respondents were allowed to select multiple options:



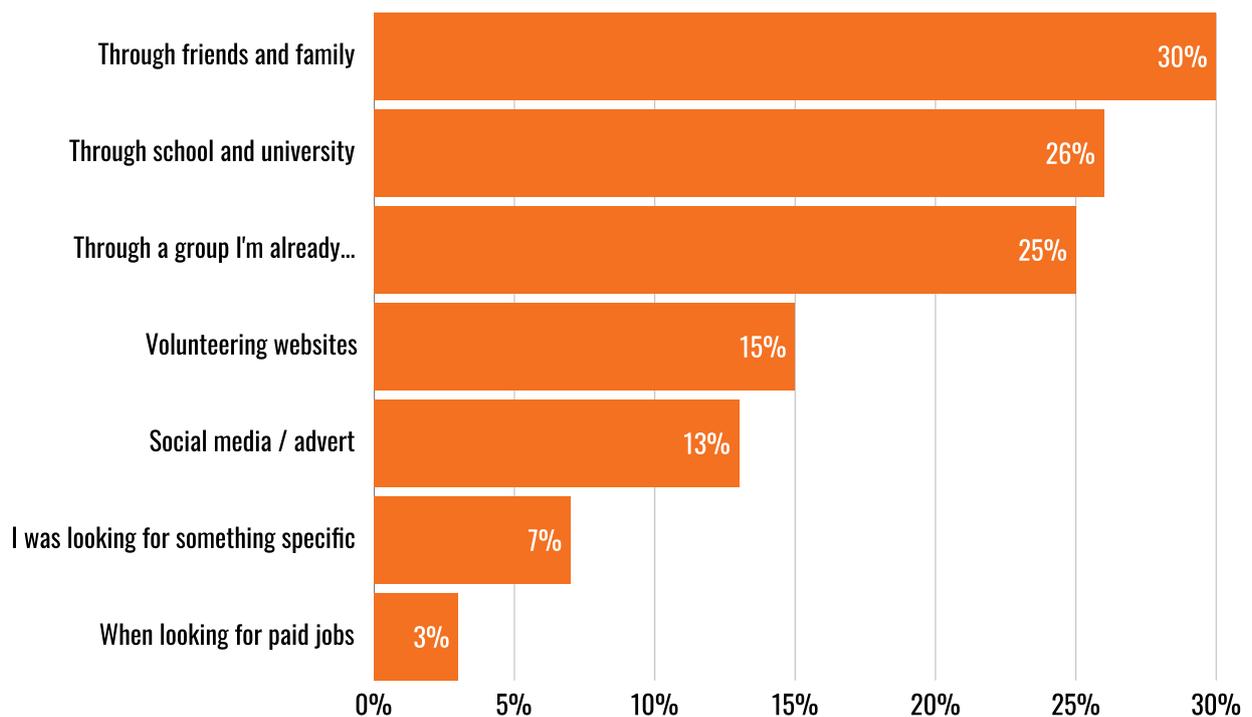
The survey also asked where young people had first volunteered. This was an open text question but the responses have been categorised into the following:

Sector	Count	% of Total
Advice and advocacy	4	1%
Animals	5	2%
Charity shop	28	12%
Children and young people	19	8%
Education	2	1%
Environment	5	2%
Foodbank	2	1%
Fundraising	15	6%
Health	11	5%
Library	2	1%
Local	18	8%
Older people	4	2%
Religious	11	5%

School	25	10%
Sports	37	15%
The arts	7	3%
Uncategorisable	9	4%
Via uniformed youth group	32	13%
Young Scot	4	2%

239 respondents gave details of their first volunteering opportunity. Responses here included volunteering by supporting sports groups such as teams or riding stables (15%); with uniformed groups such as the Guides, Scouts and Cadets (13%); charity shop volunteering (12%) and volunteering in schools (10%).

It became clear through data analysis that routes into volunteering, such as schools, sports teams and youth/uniformed groups, are crucial to introduce and support young people in making that first step into volunteering their time. The survey also asked where young people find out about volunteering opportunities:

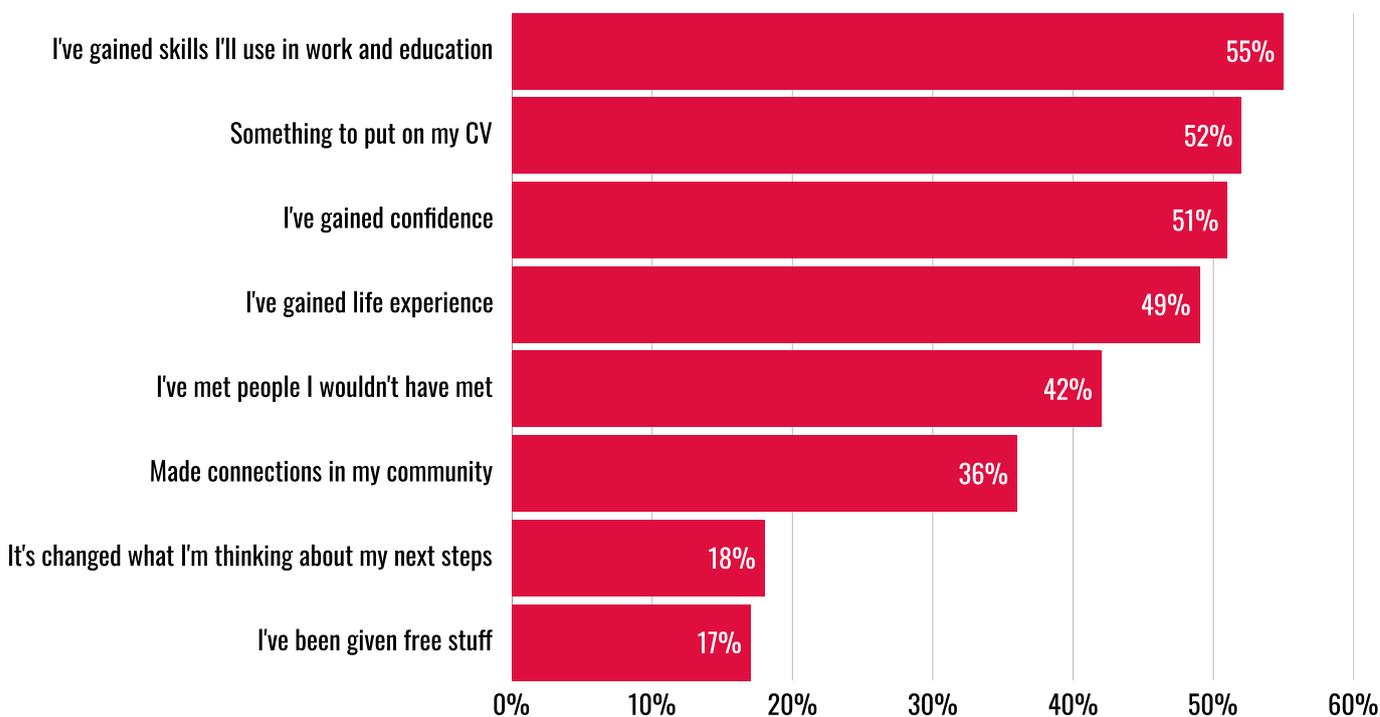


Friends and family (30%), school or university (26%) and groups they were already involved in (25%) dominated the responses to this question, highlighting a clear need to ensure these avenues continue to and improve their ability to communicate volunteering opportunities to young people. Family/friends/other personal relationships can be great ambassadors for volunteering and in encouraging others to get involved, but there is also a strong need to improve the other methods there are for communicating these opportunities to young people.

The benefits of volunteering to young people

Following on from why young people got into volunteering, we explored what benefits they've experienced through their volunteering opportunities.

- 55% of respondents had gained skills they would use in work.
- 52% noted that volunteering was something they could put on their CV.
- 51% had gained confidence
- 49% had gained life experience
- 35% of respondents had gained a qualification through volunteering. (Examples given here included Tennis leader qualification; Duke of Edinburgh Awards; Saltire Award; First Aid and Food Hygiene certifications; Scouts Young Leader Award Scheme)





It has helped me make social connections that have changed me as a person, which in turn has made a very big positive impact on my mental health. By being surrounded by people who are trying to help you do and grow, and being pushed to achieve, I have become happier and gotten better mental health



Confidence, understanding. Empathy



I have learned how to manage money in a professional sense. I have developed my ability to work with co-workers. I have learnt how to manage different situations with customers.

We also thought it important to capture the positive impact young people perceived their volunteering had and is having on their wider community. Of the 105 comments in response to this survey question:

12 examples given related to fundraising:

- I did fundraising at school and Scout group which provided the school/class with equipment and also fundraiser for my scout group for a trip to Spain and equipment for the group
- When I did a Boys Brigade coffee morning to help Gaza
- Yes! Raising money for Epilepsy Scotland. My family were in the newspaper!

11 related to providing opportunities in their community. Examples given here include:

- We remodelled the youth space building which then made the building look newer and maybe brought new people in

11 examples concerned working to alleviate the effects of poverty in communities.

- Volunteering with Letham4All has supported me a lot with making positive impact in the community through working in the community fridge and in the cafe. Also while doing the toddler group and family fun days. These all support families and local people who are struggling with money and need something that they can do that is very inexpensive or free and offers and dignified route to do so.
- Community Fridge helped local people in food poverty.

10 related directly to children and young people:

- I helped a young girl gain her brownie badge.
- Getting to meet children from different backgrounds and helping them have an hour and a half of just being a kid.

- It was good teaching kids life skills at Scouts
- I was able to help kids have a good time while being safe

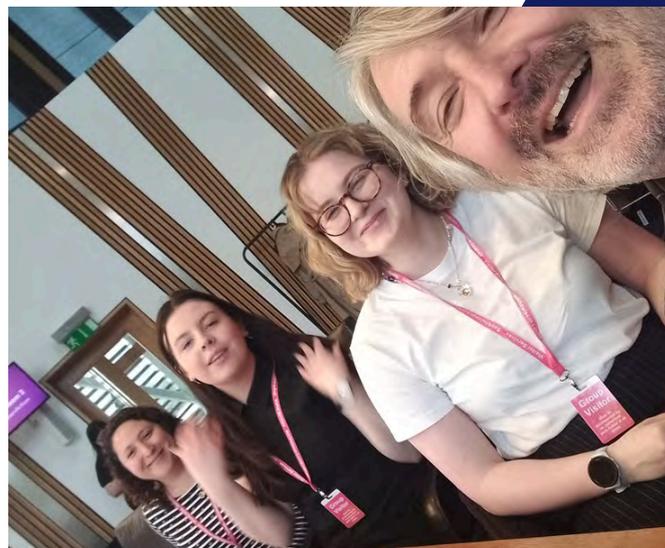
Barriers to volunteering

It was vital we heard directly from young people what the barriers and challenges were to them volunteering at all or for their volunteering experience to be as fulfilling, accessible and accommodating as possible.

Of the young people surveyed who had never volunteered, 89% said they would like to volunteer in the future, emphasising the need to make volunteering as open and accessible as possible for all young people. There are large numbers of young people with volunteering experience and a desire amongst those who haven't, to get involved sometime in the future. It is therefore imperative that we listen to the barriers and negative experiences young people face when volunteering and actively try to mitigate these to make participation equitable. A barrier which featured in the survey and was detailed much further in the focus group sessions was around the lack of volunteering opportunities that young people found interesting and engaging.

43% of those surveyed who didn't volunteer cited "No interesting opportunities in my area" as a reason why, and 22% cited "No opportunities which are for people like me in my area".

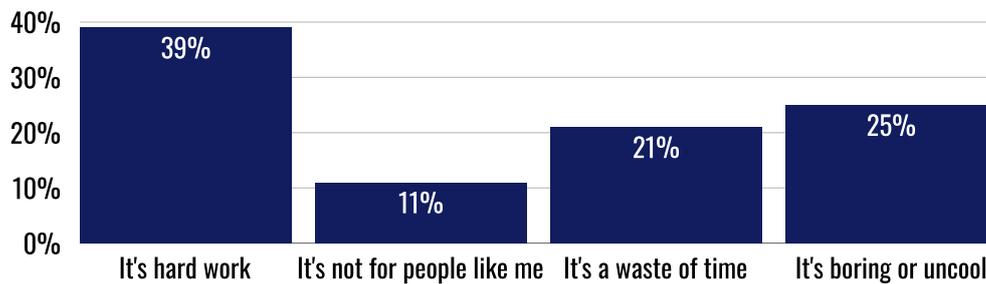
Our focus group sessions all further emphasised this being a barrier for them accessing volunteering opportunities. A participant from Shetland stated that despite there being opportunities promoted in their local area, they "just never found it interesting". Similar sentiments were expressed from participants in our Dundee and South Ayrshire sessions.



Young people's lives can be extremely busy with commitments to education, family, caring responsibilities, clubs/hobbies etc. "My time is precious" said one participant during our Dundee session who expressed how much homework and lack of free time they had in their daily lives. 38% of survey respondents who didn't volunteer chose "I don't have the time" as a reason why and 8% also gave "volunteering is not how I want to spend my time" as a reason.

Many young people rightfully view their free time as important and therefore if they're to be encouraged to give this free time to a volunteering opportunity, these opportunities have to be interesting and appealing to them.

Aligning with a lack of volunteering opportunities young people find interesting and exciting, is the negative perception that some young people still have about volunteering. We asked about any negative views young people might have about volunteering:



21% answered “volunteering can be a waste of time” and 25% answered “it’s boring or uncool”. This further emphasises the need for volunteering opportunities to be exciting and appealing to young people. In Dundee we heard of there being volunteering opportunities with local charity shops, but there was a clear perception from the young people in the focus group that this was very much “for older people” and they wouldn’t feel comfortable taking up these opportunities due to that perception. Therefore, opportunities specifically targeting young people are essential.

These volunteering roles must also be accessible and supportive of all young people as far as possible. A survey respondent stated: “It’s a lot harder to find wheelchair accessible opportunities or COVID safe ones.” The lack of accessible opportunities or the perceived lack of these opportunities can be extremely off putting for those young people who have a disability or long-term illness.

Young people find the communicating and publicising of volunteering opportunities to be a major barrier for them getting involved. We just discussed the need for opportunities to be exciting and interesting for young people, but these opportunities must get to young people in a way that works and is accessible for them.

From the 310 responses to the survey about how young people find out about volunteering opportunities, the answer which got most acknowledgments that wasn’t informally through friends and family was through school at 26%.

The feedback from the Dundee focus group came through strongly that from their experience “the communication of opportunities is awful”. This sentiment was shared by the groups in Shetland and Dumfries and Galloway who cited themselves and other young people in their community have a lack of awareness of volunteering opportunities.

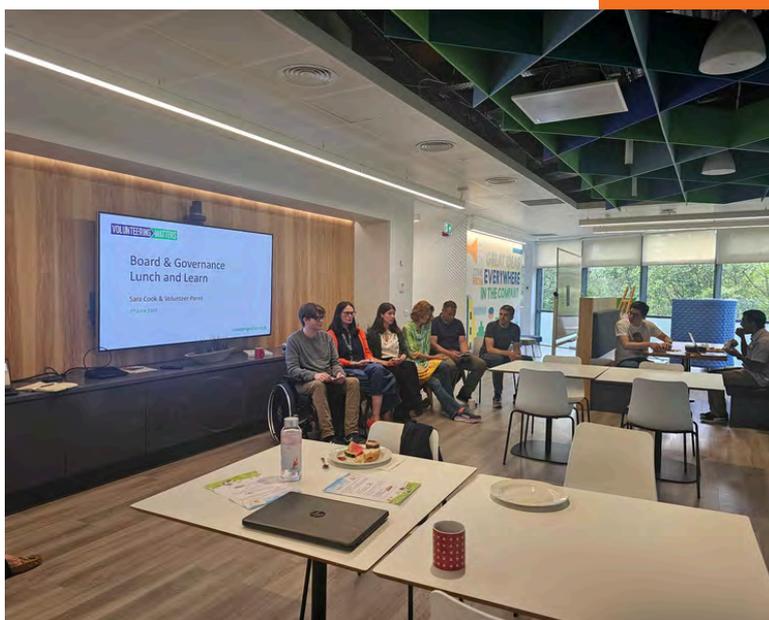
The group in South Ayrshire also communicated that there weren’t enough opportunities to volunteer coming to them where they could access them. They went on to say not only was there a lack of general communication of available opportunities, but those that are communicated lack clarity in the role, what will be expected of them and what the benefits are of taking part in the opportunity, “what you get out of it can be vague”. They cited that the organisation who the actual opportunity is with and role would often be missing.

A further barrier conveyed by the South Ayrshire group stemming from this poor communication and connection, was that young people can feel intimidated by not knowing who to contact and feel awkward about reaching out to organisations they don't know. They explained some young people would find having to reach out off-putting and not having a link between them and the new organisation would prevent some from taking up an opportunity.

Feedback from focus group participants illustrated that the idea of volunteering alone was off-putting for some young people, especially younger participants. It was suggested that being able to bring a friend or volunteering as part of a known group is and would be seen as significantly more appealing by many young people.

Transport is a huge barrier to some young people accessing volunteering opportunities. We heard this directly from our focus group in Dumfries and Galloway, which is one of the largest local authorities by area in Scotland and many towns/villages are very far apart with sometimes limited transport to get to and from. Many young people have to rely on their parents/youth workers etc to drive them to volunteering opportunities, which isn't an option for many. Unreliable and infrequent bus services, particularly late at night or at the weekend was unanimously given as a barrier from focus group participants who live rurally.

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Connected to transport, another barrier is the timing of volunteering opportunities for young people. Those who live rurally struggle to access opportunities late at night or on a Sunday for example when public transport is at its most infrequent. On the other hand, some volunteering opportunities can clash with young people's other commitments such as school, or could be too demanding or time intensive for what young people have going on at that moment. Flexibility around the other life events and commitments of young volunteers has to be respected and factored into planning.

Finally, some young people shared that volunteering felt like "working for free," particularly when the role mirrored or was similar to a job that adults were paid to do. Without incentives, recognition, or personal benefit, the perceived value of volunteering diminished for those young people involved.

Key messages and recommendations

After examining the barriers and negative experiences young people face when taking part in or trying to access volunteering opportunities, we explored what high quality volunteering opportunities look like for young people across Scotland.

Through reflecting on the barriers and being guided at all times by the young people who took part in the research in what high quality volunteering looks like for them, 9 recommendations have been formed to act as a guide for organisations looking to recruit and retain young people as volunteers; how they best communicate and recruit, make their opportunities as inclusive and flexible as possible, and ensure young people get the most out of their volunteering. The recommendations are:

1. Clarity

Be clear about what the volunteering opportunity is, what's involved and what will be expected of the volunteer, as well as what incentives/benefits there will be for the young volunteer

2. Volunteer Management

Train those in a volunteer management position (paid or voluntary) to be able to effectively support the needs of their young volunteers, including around the capacity and availability of young volunteers.

3. Communication

Take volunteering opportunities directly to where young people are i.e. in schools, youth work settings and on social media

4. Friends

Create volunteering opportunities that allow young people to come with a friend or a group of young people where possible

5. Recognition

Ensure young people gain recognition for the volunteering they're doing, whether that be through praise, feeling valued or awards/accreditation.

6. Variety and quality

Offer a variety of quality opportunities for young people.

7. Flexibility

Make your volunteering opportunities flexible and time appropriate to the other commitments of young people

8. Transport

Where possible help young people with transport to access volunteering opportunities, by providing it yourself, or being understanding of the potentially limited transport infrastructure.

9. Equality, diversity and inclusion

Commit to understanding and tackling barriers young people may face to volunteering, invest in making your opportunities accessible, and training staff and volunteers in inclusive practice.

Recommendation 9 was identified as required by our youth panel, following the analysis of the research and identifying a gap.



Be clear about what the volunteering opportunity is, what's involved and what will be expected of the volunteer, as well as what incentives/benefits there will be for the young volunteer

Our research illustrated that young people looking to volunteer want clarity around 3 key areas:

- Firstly, they want it clearly stated what the volunteering opportunity is. Our focus group in South Ayrshire highlighted that from their experience, some volunteering opportunities clearly state the organisation but not the specific role that young person would be undertaking.
- Secondly, young people want it clearly communicated what the role will involve and what is expected of them in terms of time commitment and frequency. Detailed role descriptions and expectations should be provided from the outset.
- Lastly, young people's time is extremely valuable and they are often juggling multiple commitments, so they want it be made clear what benefits they will gain through giving up their time. Clear and concise messaging around the opportunity is extremely important to young people when exploring and committing to a volunteering opportunity.



Train those in a volunteer management position (paid or voluntary) to be able to effectively support the needs of their young volunteers, including around the capacity and availability of young volunteers.

Every volunteer giving up their time needs to feel supported from those in a management position, and this is perhaps even more important when referring to young volunteers. For many young people, volunteering can be their first step into a more formal way of working out with the classroom environment. Each young person has their own set of needs that must be respected and met, such as additional support, accessibility, low confidence etc. Organisations should provide training to those managing young volunteers, introducing them to the variety of needs young volunteers specifically may have, similar to how they would lead and manage young colleagues.

The survey provided some examples of negative experiences young volunteers had faced in relation to the poor management and support that had been in place:



In a charity shop; my 'manager' often treated me like an inconvenience and would either tell me to not bother showing up, or I'd get there and they'd tell me to just go back home, despite knowing it took me up to an hour each way to get there.



“I have signed up to volunteer and not heard back a few times. I have also attended volunteering opportunities where I have been expected to know how to do everything immediately. It felt more like a job and didn't give me space so learn, so I started volunteering somewhere else instead.”

Delving deeper, 12 survey responses were collected for this question from young people with disabilities and long-term illnesses and many of the responses given related directly to their disability/long term illness:

Young volunteers are giving up their valuable time to take up volunteering opportunities and when doing so they need to feel like they have high quality support in place to make them feel confident and comfortable to fulfil their role. This is applicable to all young volunteers, and it is critical that those in management positions are trained effectively to be able to offer the specific support required by young people.



Take volunteering opportunities directly to where young people are i.e. in schools, youth work settings and on social media



“We need organisations to come to us”

This message came through loud and clear from our focus groups. Young people are far more likely to take up volunteering opportunities if the information is brought to them in places and formats that is accessible and familiar to them.

When asked how volunteering could be made easier for young people to get involved in, 67% of young people surveyed selected “better links between schools and volunteering”. Schools are a hub of connection for many young people at different stages of their lives. As such, schools can often be the best link and mechanism to provide, promote and support internal and external volunteering opportunities. Despite this importance, only 26% of young people surveyed selected “school/university” as a way they hear about volunteering opportunities, emphasising the need for stronger links between schools and volunteering.

Establishing strong links with schools can be a great way of opening up volunteering opportunities and making them both available and accessible to lots more young people.

The task of supporting and embedding volunteering within the school curriculum doesn't have to be one that is taken on by the school alone. Working with community organisations, youth work services and charities opens so many more doors for young people.



There are numerous examples of strong partnership working that have really enhanced the offer and opportunities around volunteering in schools. Working with community organisations who have experience, resources and programmes in place can be either a great first step taken by schools or a way to further build on their volunteering infrastructure.

The survey data highlights youth work and uniformed organisations provide a first step into volunteering for a lot of young people and youth work is often a key mechanism for linking young people in with wider community volunteering opportunities and supporting young people to maintain volunteering.

#YouthVIP have developed a Youth Volunteering Schools Resource which elaborates on partnership working further and how schools can look to embed volunteering. This resource can be found at #YouthVIP: [Youth Volunteering Schools Resource | YouthLink Scotland](#)

As well as highlighting some good practice such as volunteering opportunities being pinned on schools' notice boards and featured in newsletters, our focus groups suggested having more regular contributions from organisations looking for young volunteers at school assemblies, where the information is clearly laid out to them. It was also suggested setting up stalls in schools during break and lunch times where young people can chat with organisations about what they do and what the volunteer role will require. Alternatively, young people could scan a QR code to find out more information and sign up if they're interested, which could avoid the awkwardness of having to approach people they've never met before, and all the expectations could be clearly laid out through this QR link.

Young people advocated for using social media more widely to advertise volunteering opportunities. Many young people use some form of social media, often daily, and tapping into this could increase the scope and reach of volunteering opportunities connecting with young people where they are..

69% of survey respondents selected "making it easier to find interesting opportunities" when asked for ways to make volunteering easier to get involved in, and social media platforms that young people use regularly such as Instagram and TikTok are places where young people access a lot of their information. Some organisations do advertise opportunities on social media but only 13% of survey respondents cited "social media" as a way in which they hear about volunteering opportunities. This statistic, and hearing directly from young people in our focus group sessions in Dundee and South Ayrshire, it's something that needs to be done more frequently, and in better quality/detail, to access and really connect with young people.

Taking volunteering opportunities directly to where young people are at, rather than them having to explore and seek them out themselves is a key step to increase the number of young people accessing volunteering.

4

Create volunteering opportunities that allow young people to come with a friend or a group of young people where possible

Feedback from focus group participants illustrated that the idea of volunteering alone was off-putting for some young people, especially younger participants. It was suggested that being able to bring a friend or volunteering as part of a known group is and would be seen as significantly more appealing by many young people.

Our focus groups spotlighted from their own personal experience, or those of other young people, that taking part in volunteering opportunities can be a daunting experience, whether in relation to making that initial step and enquiry/applying for a role or also when actually fulfilling the role itself. Showing up for the first day of anything can be scary no matter what age, but our research emphasised this is especially felt by some young people and therefore something that is voluntary can be a bridge young people choose not to cross. Young people can also feel quite alone and isolated when carrying out the volunteering role as they may not know any other young people involved, or they may be the only young person there completely.

Therefore, we encourage, when possible, to create volunteering opportunities that allow young people to come along and engage with a friend or as part of a bigger group. For example, a participant in our focus groups explained they engaged in a volunteering opportunity with a friend as a way of first experiencing volunteering and this made the experience a lot less scary and more appealing. Through their volunteering experience they gained a lot of self-confidence and then explored new opportunities on their own, but they attested being able to first try an opportunity with a friend as what got them through the door and engaged.

We got a clear message from our research that volunteering opportunities being available and open to pairs or larger groups would encourage many more young people to get involved and remove what can be a significant social barrier.

5

Ensure young people gain recognition for the volunteering they're doing, whether that be through praise, feeling valued or awards/accreditation.

Young people take up volunteering for a variety of reasons, each as important as the other. Whatever their motivation, a common theme emerged from our research and that is how important it is for young people to gain recognition for the volunteering they're doing.



It should be a 2-sided thing so it's not just helping them, it's helping you as well

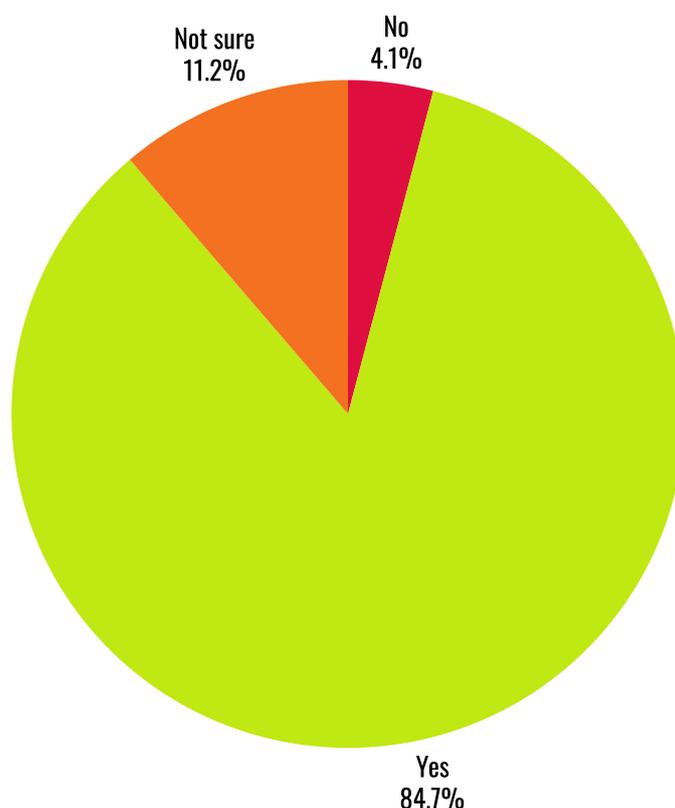
That recognition can come in many forms and can come in a form specific to each organisation but it's vital that young people feel their volunteering and hard work is acknowledged.

Our survey indicated that a lot of young people get involved in volunteering with a view to taking something tangible away from it. When asked why they got involved:

- 34% said for work experience/my CV
- 33% said for personal or skills development
- 31% said to get an award

This is further supported by 2 more survey questions.

We asked “Would you be more likely to start volunteering or take a volunteering role if you knew it would increase your chance of getting a job, or into college or university?”



Additionally, 48% of respondents, when asked how volunteering could be made easier for young people to get involved in, selected 'Making it easier to use volunteering experience to move on into work or college' as an answer.

Our focus groups continued this theme, with CV development and accredited awards being very important factors for them when considering taking up a volunteering opportunity or not.

Volunteering awards such as Duke of Edinburgh and Saltire are great examples that can be factored into your volunteering programme to provide accreditation for the work young volunteers will naturally be doing by fulfilling the role. Information about a range of youth awards can be found via the Awards Network.

Tangible benefits don't have to be formal accreditation. Skills and personal development are also important benefits that young people are seeking to gain out of volunteering. Being able to articulate their experiences and development on CVs, further education application forms and job applications are a high priority for many young people. Therefore, organisations should create opportunities that will allow young people to develop relevant skills and be able to articulate and recognise this skill development. And these development opportunities and experiences should be clearly communicated and conveyed to the young people. Resources like the National Youth Work Outcomes and Skills Framework can support young people to articulate their learning and development.

As previously discussed, young people can find it daunting to volunteer and it can be a big step for them, and they also work very hard to fulfil their volunteering role so it is essential that they're treated with respect and feel their work is appreciated. Recognition doesn't have to come in the form of skill development or formal accreditation, it can simply be being thanked for their contribution or being welcomed into the team and treated fairly, and like everyone else. Young people don't want to be singled out because of their age and want to feel welcome and valued at all times. Young people have so much to offer in volunteering roles, not because of their age, but through their enthusiasm and eagerness to give back. It may sound obvious to say, but we've shared examples earlier in this report of young people being treated with disrespect from volunteer managers and made to feel more like a hindrance than offering value.

39% of survey respondents felt a negative perception of volunteering held by some young people is that 'it's hard work', and the volunteering role often is, so it's vital that young people are thanked, praised and rewarded accordingly.



Offer a variety of quality opportunities for young people.



“It shouldn't feel like a chore”

The above quote could be echoed by many other participants in our research. There is a strong desire from young people for volunteering opportunities to be enjoyable and relatable to young people and their interests, hobbies and passions.

43% of those surveyed who didn't volunteer cited “No interesting opportunities in my area” as a reason why, and 25% felt there was perception amongst young people that volunteering is “boring or uncool”.

There is a perception that a lot of the volunteering opportunities aren't specifically targeted at young people and therefore can lack the hook to get young people involved and remain actively involved.

Volunteering opportunities themselves must be of interest to young people and the environment in which they are carried out must be inclusive of young people as well.

Creating volunteering opportunities which take place outdoors and are active, or allow young people to channel their creativity and hobbies, were some repeated suggestions that came from our focus group work.



Make your volunteering opportunities flexible and time appropriate to the other commitments of young people

An integral aspect of young people being able to access volunteering opportunities is that they're flexible and accommodating to their capacity and availability. Young volunteers often have many other commitments that can require more focus at certain times, such as schoolwork and exams, and their capacity to fulfil their volunteering role may reduce for periods of time.

Respecting and being understanding of young people's fluctuating schedules, and therefore their capacity to volunteer, is crucial to encouraging young people to take on volunteer roles in the first place, and feel respected and supported.

As well as the flexibility around young people's schedules, the timing of volunteering opportunities also has to be appropriate for young people. Accessing opportunities late in the evening when public transport is reduced may be a barrier for young people, as well as late afternoon for example when they may have extracurricular activities with school.

A flexible approach and roles are required to allow young people to engage with the volunteering opportunity whilst also balancing their many other responsibilities and commitments, and failure to do so could ostracise many.



Where possible help young people with transport to access volunteering opportunities, by providing it yourself, or being understanding of the potentially limited transport infrastructure.

As mentioned when discussing barriers to volunteering, poor transport links and infrastructure is a huge factor that can exclude and prevent some young people accessing volunteering opportunities. This is felt more extremely for those young people who live in rural settings. Our focus groups in Shetland and Dumfries

and Galloway were able to testify in great detail about the difficulty they have sometimes due to the limited transport service. Buses are unreliable and very infrequent particularly in the evenings and at the weekend. The focus group participants in Dumfries and Galloway highlighted the great level of support they receive from youth work services to access volunteering opportunities as they often provide transport to get young people to where they need to be. One participant stated “without that support from youth work, I just wouldn’t be able to volunteer in the way that I do”. Many young people living rurally have to rely on parents/youth work services to transport them to access volunteering, but this isn’t possible for all young people and a real imbalance can be created.

Providing transport for young volunteers may not always be possible due to limited capacity and logistics but we urge, when possible, to factor that into planning as it can open so many more doors for young people who live rurally to access volunteering. The benefits these young volunteers will bring to an organisation are well worth that planning.

Linking back to volunteer managers and opportunities themselves being flexible, the local transport infrastructure must be considered and factored in when creating and planning opportunities, and an understanding given to young people if they’re unable to fulfil certain commitments, particularly at times when public transport is extremely limited.

Recommendation 9 was identified as required by our youth panel, following the analysis of the research and identifying a gap.

9

Commit to understanding and tackling barriers young people may face to volunteering, invest in making your opportunities accessible, and training staff and volunteers in inclusive practice.

Something that came through strongly from our Youth VIP panel members post- research that they felt was important to include in the recommendations was the need for volunteering staff to adopt inclusive practice and that all staff should receive Equity, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) training. Staff should be trained in EDI to highlight the importance of creating volunteering opportunities that are accessible to all young people, and to equip them with the tools to appreciate intersectionality, recognise and address bias, discrimination, and other barriers to inclusion of volunteering experiences.

All young people need support and understanding to meaningfully volunteer, but those with protected characteristics can often need more support to access, maintain and thrive in volunteering roles.

This recommendation was supported by some strong statements and findings from the survey when looking at young people who have a disability/long term illness.

12 survey responses were collected for the question ‘Have you had any bad experiences volunteering or trying to volunteer?’ from young people with disabilities and long-term illnesses and many of the responses given related directly to their disability/long term illness, which includes neurodiversity:



I have a disability and I have found it hard to navigate communicating this during my volunteering, often resorted to not saying anything to avoid complications or change how people perceive what I'm capable of.



It wasn't very wheelchair accessible which was upsetting.



They discriminated against me at the shop because of my disabilities

Furthermore, the survey asked what stops young people from getting involved in volunteering, and of those who identified a disability/long term illness, we saw examples relate directly to the difficulty in finding volunteering opportunities which are suitable for young people with different conditions:



I've got heart disease and get tired easily



I have a sleep disorder called narcolepsy so I don't know how I'd be able to volunteer to be honest, especially if it's after school because I wouldn't be able to function/have a sleep attack.

Volunteering opportunities must be flexible to the physical and emotional needs of all young people. Young volunteers must feel their needs are acknowledged, supported and adapted for when taking part in volunteering opportunities, but importantly in the creation of these volunteering opportunities in the first place. A flexible approach should be implemented to allow that young person to engage whilst also respecting their own physical and emotional needs and not feel like they're viewed any less because of it.

The survey provided some great examples of the benefits volunteering has had for young people with a disability/long term illness when the volunteering role has been accessible and inclusive:



I don't know, it made me feel better mentally and physically



I met other wheelchair users my age for the first time



When volunteering at [performance club], the constant social interaction helped with my anxiety

How to communicate a volunteering opportunity – In practice

Using our research findings and being steered directly by the voice of young people, we have created an example of what good promotion of a volunteering opportunity should look like and contain. A suggestion from our Dundee focus group: When asked what type of volunteering opportunities would be of interest to them, one respondent said they loved spending time at the local skate park and if there was a way they could volunteer there, they would be extremely keen to get involved. We've used that idea to create a mock Instagram post, featuring what young people think is important for a volunteering role to contain and for this to be clearly communicated and signposted:

The graphic illustrates that there is an opportunity to get involved at Dundee Skate Park, through bold text and images. It clearly states:

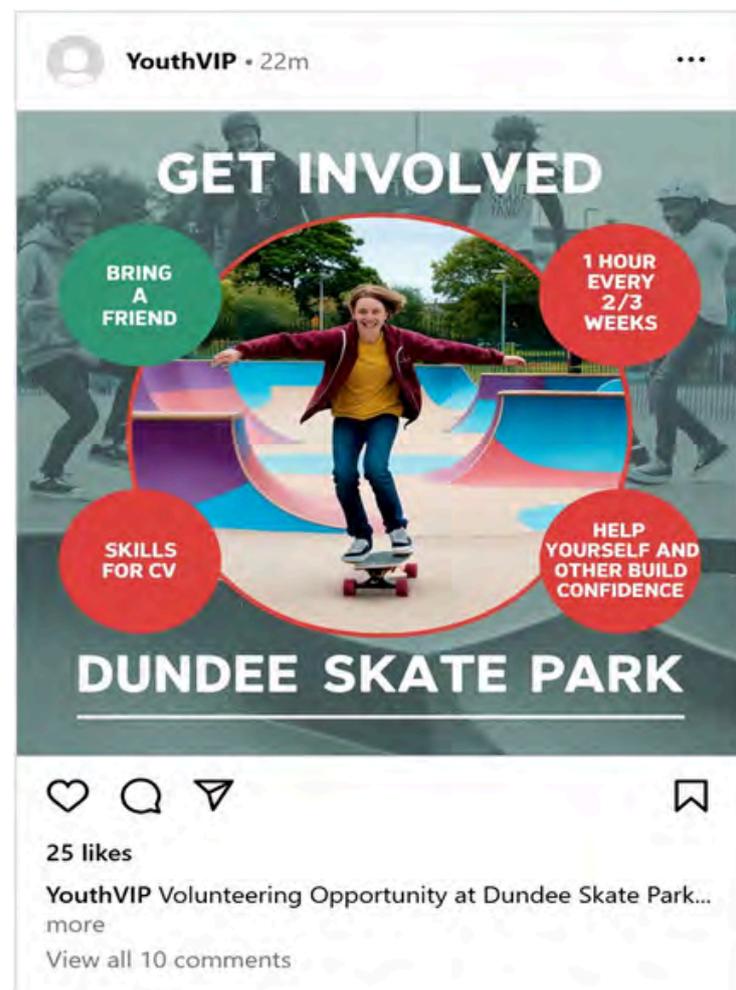
- The time commitment and frequency of opportunity
- What the young volunteer will get out of it, both in terms of CV building and their own confidence building
- They can bring a friend along, so young people don't have to sign up alone

It'd be very difficult to cram all the key aspects and features of the volunteering opportunity into a graphic so the caption below would feature the following:

“Volunteering Opportunity at Dundee Skate Park, 1 hour every 2/3 weeks. Help others and yourself build confidence, develop communication skills by helping other young people learn how to skate. Get first aid training, learn skate park maintenance and teaching beginner level skating. Get involved here (link to website)”

This caption elaborates on the content of the graphic and gives more detail about the role and what it will entail as well as the benefits both formal and informal.

Utilising social media and taking volunteer opportunities directly to where young people are and spend a lot of their time is what young people want. They want posts to be engaging and brought to life, and contain key, top line information about the opportunity, with a chance to then find out more detailed information via a website link/QR code. This example showcases some of the key features required, as directed by young people, when advertising and trying to clearly communicate with them about volunteering opportunities.



Conclusion



Volunteering has immense potential to enrich young people’s lives and contribute meaningfully to communities across Scotland, and we see the evidence of this daily. However, volunteering isn’t inclusive to all young people, and barriers related to areas such as access, communication, support, and perception are preventing more young people gaining the benefits that volunteering can bring. Through this research, young people have provided clear, actionable feedback on what needs to change.

The voices of young people consistently highlight a need for greater inclusivity, flexibility, and clarity in volunteering opportunities. They want volunteering that is social, purposeful, rewarding, and relevant to their lives. A lot of young people have a desire to engage in volunteering but opportunities have to be designed specifically for the needs of young people.

This report and its recommendations will hopefully act as a springboard for change in how volunteering opportunities are designed, structured and communicated to young people.

#youth VIP

About us

#YouthVIP is a multi-organisation initiative, made up of Volunteering Matters, YouthLink Scotland, and Young Scot, existing to promote inclusive and participatory youth volunteering across Scotland. Formed from 13 recommendations made by young people from the Youth Volunteering Innovation Project (Youth VIP) to the Scottish Government in 2020, we now work with organisations, Local Government and young people to make this vision a reality.

Contact Fraser Clark for more information - fraser.clark@volunteeringmatters.org.uk

Further resources

[HOME | Youth VIP](#)

[YouthVIP: Youth Volunteering Schools Resource | YouthLink Scotland](#)

[Youth Work and Volunteering](#)



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