

Voluntary Action Merthyr Tydfil

Your local county voluntary council



4. Volunteers

4.16 Involving young people as volunteers

This information sheet is designed to help you to understand how to involve young people as volunteers and to navigate barriers you may feel there are to getting them involved.

There is a section on the legal considerations to involving young people and a section on practical considerations, such as how to recruit, retain and best involve young people as volunteers.

In every county you will find a number of services for those engaging young people aged 14-25 in voluntary action. This includes support and advice from local advisors, further information sheets on areas such as promotion and recognition of volunteers' contributions through the Millennium Volunteers Award (MV). You can find out about all of this and much, much more on our website www.gwirvol.org

Can under 18's volunteer?

The short and simple answer is yes. There are no legal restrictions around volunteers and age. The issues, more often, are around what roles are suitable and the practicalities surrounding this. It is recommended that you discuss other commitments young people may have, such as education and employment pressures when considering the amount of time they will volunteer.

Why involve young people in voluntary action?

Involving young people under the age of 18 can seem a daunting prospect for some organisations, but the benefits to organisations, the young people and the wider community can certainly make it very worthwhile.

Benefits to young people:

- A way to improve their wellbeing, by making a valuable contribution to their community.
- Experiences through which to develop emotional, social and professional skills.
- An opportunity to gain experience which may help them to decide on career choices and also to develop transferable skills.
- Gaining qualifications, accreditation or awards with support and mentoring from your organisation.
- References to help with job or university applications.

- May help to break down barriers between different generations
- Have fun and meet new people, making new connections.

Benefits to organisations

- You may be able to access funding.
- Young people can offer fresh ideas and enthusiasm.
- A young person may be able to suggest a new way of doing things through honest feedback.
- Development of a wider range of opportunities that appeal to different age groups
- Can help your organisation relate to clients of all ages.
- Broadening your volunteer base may allow you to access different networks.
- Young volunteers that have a good experience with your organisation may return as future volunteers, creating sustainability within your organisation.

Below are a few guidelines and recommended resources to help you in involving young people in your activities:

Health and Safety

You have a Duty of Care towards all of your volunteers. Risk assessments need to take into account the volunteers' level of understanding and experience.

Employment Law requires individual risk assessments for young employees and although this is not required for volunteers it is recommended. It is also advisable to check any bylaws in your area as some local authorities require charity shops to apply for child employment permits.

The number of hours a child is permitted to work in a week does **not** apply to volunteering and in many cases young people volunteer in their free time which is evenings and weekends.

Insurance

Some organisations will find that their current insurance for volunteers has a lower age limit of 18. If this is the case, contact the company and request that the age is lowered. Volunteers should be insured under either Public or Employers' Liability cover and the insurance policy should explicitly mention volunteers, as they may not be automatically covered. If your younger volunteers are volunteering in the same activities as your other volunteers there should not normally be an additional charge for changing the age limits of your policy.

Safeguarding

Article 1 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) provides a definition of a child as every human being below the age of eighteen years unless, under the law applicable to the child, majority is attained earlier.

Young volunteers need to be safeguarded whilst volunteering. Similarly, there are safeguarding issues when the young person themselves are volunteering with vulnerable groups including other children.

It is good practice to have in place a safeguarding policy when you involve anyone under the age of 18, whether as a volunteer or service user. (See information sheet [Model Safeguarding Policy](#))

Consideration should be given to the suitability of the role where the volunteering activity involves substantial unsupervised access to vulnerable groups, or children. In these roles a Disclosure and Barring Services check is required. Further information on Disclosure and Barring Services can be found [here](#).

Parental Consent

It is good practice to get parent/guardian consent for anyone under the age of 18 who is volunteering with your organisation. The parent should be informed about the organisation's activities and what their child will be doing, when and where.

When using photos of young volunteers for publicity purposes you need to obtain their permission and, if they are under 16, the permission of their parent/guardian to use them.

If a young person is over 16 and is living independently of parents or social services, they are able to provide their own consent.

An example personal release form can be found [here](#).

Young Volunteers and Benefits

As a general rule volunteering should not affect benefits, as long as it is in a not-for-profit organisation and only out-of-pocket expenses are reimbursed. If a young person is on Job Seekers Allowance they need to be available to attend an interview at 48 hours notice and be actively seeking work. Those receiving Carers Allowance can volunteer so long as they are still able to provide care for at least 35 hours a week.

Further guidance can be found in the information sheet on volunteering and welfare benefits which can be found [here](#).

Ideas for involving young people

So now you understand some of the more technical aspects of involving young people you may be asking 'so how do I go about actually getting them involved?'

Young people have told us they want roles which are exciting and engaging, but of course this means different things for everyone. To find out what young people would like to do with your organisation as a volunteer, a good starting point is to ask current or potential volunteers about types of roles they would be interested in.

Giving young people a say, shows you respect their opinions and want to listen to them. Getting them involved in shaping roles, projects or even the organisation can give them a sense of ownership and create a real connection with your organisations aims, their role and the benefiting community.

Ways in which you can do this include;

- During an informal chat when they enquire about volunteering
- During one to one or group supervisions
- Forming a youth forum to enable your young volunteers to come together to offer feedback and advice.
- Having a young volunteer as a representative at team meetings, as an advisor to your board of trustees or having a young person on your board.

If you are keen to involve young volunteers, but at present only have volunteer roles which are suitable for over 18's you might want to consider developing other opportunities.

What about encouraging a group to help you with a campaign to raise awareness? This could be in their schools with their peers or in the wider community. Link up with your local [Youth Led Grant panel](#) to find out if there are young people who might like to develop a small youth led project in support of your organisation.

Do you have trouble keeping up with all the ever changing technology? Does the internet seem just too confusing? How about asking a young person to show you how it works or perhaps help you promote your activities through social media? They could even help you to design a newsletter/website or admin system to keep up with all your volunteers.

Are there any group activities they could help out with, where they would be fully supervised?

If a young person enquires about your opportunities, but you don't feel you have anything suitable, ask them what they can do or what they had in mind. As well as enthusiasm and energy, young people have many skills that would be valuable to your organisation, sometimes they just forget to mention these.

How to recruit young volunteers

So where can you find these skilled, dedicated young people? The simple answer is - everywhere. Here are just a few examples of ways to find young volunteers.

1. Use your local Volunteer Centre

Your first stop should be the Youth Volunteering Advisors (YVAs). There are YVAs in most Volunteer Centre's in Wales. They aim to help organisations develop more and better quality volunteering opportunities for young people and to recruit and place young people into these opportunities. You can find the contact details for your local YVA's [here](#).

Your local YVA can promote your volunteering opportunities through a [national database](#) that can be accessed by anyone in Wales.

2. Go where young people are

Make contact with organisations that already engage young people, such as schools, colleges, universities, youth clubs, Scout and Guide units, youth networks, job centres, youth offending services, social services. Ask if you can speak to the young people about your opportunities, take along all relevant information and application packs for them to take away.

- a. There may be courses being delivered for which your volunteering opportunities would offer some valuable experience. Consider speaking to pupils or students who may have a passion or skill set you are looking for.
- b. These organisations may host events at which your opportunities could be appropriately promoted, such as a Careers or Enrichment event.

3. Consider your existing publicity.

Are you online? Do you use social media? Do your leaflets appeal to young people? Are your activities geared towards older volunteers? Do you in any way show or state that you are seeking younger volunteers? Young people will often assume that your activities are not for them unless you actually say otherwise. So tell young people what you are doing, say what the lower age of your volunteers can be and highlight the benefits of the opportunity that appeal to young people.

'We want to be able to find volunteering opportunities on social media sites like Twitter, Facebook and Instagram'

WCVA Youth Engagement Consultation, 2017

Ensuring young people understand the role, can commit and feel welcome

A common myth is that **all** young people are unreliable and immature. Young people are **people**; like everyone else, no two are alike. If at interview you are unsure whether they understand the role, why not invite them to training and give them an opportunity to find out more and demonstrate what they understand? Could you offer them a taster day to come into the office or take part in a group activity to see if it is the right role for them?

You will need to take into consideration pressures of school work, jobs and social time. This can be discussed during the initial interview or even after training so that the potential volunteer can get an idea of the commitment you are looking for and decide if they can give this.

Providing a buddy or mentor that can support the young volunteer when they first get started can also help the young person to understand their role and feel welcome.

Retaining Young People as Volunteers

How can you show your young volunteers that you are committed to them and encourage them to continue to volunteer with you?

1. Consider individual motivations for volunteering. Is it to gain new skills? Give something back and feel they are making a difference? Make friends? Add to their CV?

'We want to hear more about the benefits of volunteering and the difference it makes to young people'

'We want to know about the potential impact we could make'

WCVA Youth Engagement
Consultation, 2017

In a recent consultation with young people the top three reasons for volunteering were to gain new experience, make a difference to something they care about and to make new friends.

Can you help fulfil these needs by offering training, developing their own roles or creating new ones? If the training is not accredited externally, you could accredit it internally, by setting a number of standards and outcomes for the young person to achieve. Where training is available, make sure volunteers know about these opportunities.

2. Social events help young volunteers settle in, meet others and create a social network. This could be an opportunity that volunteers might assist with, from hosting volunteer forum meetings to after volunteering 'get togethers'.
3. Outlining the transferable skills and experiences the volunteers are developing can be helpful where volunteers are volunteering for career or educational progression. Offering references, where appropriate, shows your volunteers that you are committed to helping them further their career or education.

4. Recognising young volunteers contributions is a great way to make them feel valued. Young people recently shared with us a variety of ways they would like to be recognised for their volunteering contributions.
 - a. Some young people would like awards or certificates; you could consider delivering the [Millennium Volunteers Award \(MV\)](#) or nominating young people for [Young Volunteer of the Year](#) or delivering your own certificate scheme for volunteers.
 - b. Some volunteers would like to be recognised for their passion, length of service or expert skills and knowledge. Providing ambassador type roles enable young people to take on a new role with status and further enhance their ability to promote what your organisation does and what they do to other young people.
 - c. Young people like to know that you and any beneficiaries appreciate that they are giving their time. Seeing the difference they make and knowing that it is valued can help a young person become more confident, feel a sense of achievement and help them feel a part of the community.
 - d. Showing appreciation can be as simple as saying thank you, giving a card or featuring a volunteer on a website, or as elaborate as a special volunteer's outing or an awards ceremony.

NB/ Remember volunteers have different preferences for how they are recognised so it is best to have a conversation with volunteers about what they feel comfortable with.

And finally,

Get feedback – find out about the young person's experience of volunteering and how you might be able to make it more enjoyable or engaging by asking them. This could be through informal conversations, formal supervision sessions or by providing an anonymous option for volunteer feedback.

Collecting feedback from all exiting volunteers is also a helpful way to find out if there is room for improvement in how volunteers are inducted, managed and supported. **Further reading and resources**

See also;

- Information sheet 4.4 Recruiting, selecting and inducting volunteers
- Information sheet 4.7 How to ensure volunteer satisfaction
- Information sheet 4.8 Keeping volunteers safe
- Information sheet 4.12 Volunteers and welfare benefits

General information and advice regarding involving young volunteers

A website for young volunteers in Wales - [GwirVol](#)

The report from the [Youth Engagement Consultation](#) (March, 2017)

[Millennium Volunteers](#) Award - for recognising volunteering hours of 14 – 25 year olds

[Youth Led Grants](#) – funding for youth led volunteering and social action

[#iwill campaign](#) – information on the UK wide youth social action campaign

[The Charity Social Media Toolkit](#) – resources to assist charities to consider their use of social media

<https://www.skillsplatform.org/charitysocialmediatoolkit/>

Charity Commission - [guidance on vulnerable beneficiaries including children](#)

Welsh Government – [Safe from Harm: Safeguarding Children in Voluntary and Community Organisations in Wales.](#)

Health & Safety Executive - www.hse.gov.uk/youngpeople/law/index.htm

With thanks to

Active young volunteers in Wales, Youth Volunteer Advisors and the Volunteering Wales Youth Network

Disclaimer

The information provided in this sheet is intended for guidance only. It is not a substitute for professional advice and we cannot accept any responsibility for loss occasioned as a result of any person acting or refraining from acting upon it.

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