

Wales Council for Voluntary Action

Supporting charities, volunteers and communities

4. Volunteers

4.16 Involving young people as volunteers



This information sheet is designed to help you to understand how to involve young people aged 14-25 more as volunteers and to navigate barriers that may stop a young person becoming a volunteer.

So why involve young people?

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 bringing an added dimension and experience to volunteering. Volunteering enables young people to feel part of their community and more included.

Benefits to young people:

- Work experience.
- Can get references.
- Develop social skills.
- Break down barriers between generations.
- Have fun!
- Access to job market.
- Feel valued and gain confidence.
- Gain qualifications.

Benefits to organisations

- Funding.
- Fresh ideas and enthusiasm.
- Honesty (feedback).
- Diversity.
- Ability to relate to clients.
- Access to different networks.
- They are the future older volunteers and may return at a later age if they have had a good experience with the organisation.

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

Can under 18s 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 school and employment pressures when considering the amount of time, they will volunteer.

Health and Safety

When involving under 18s in your activities you have a 'Duty of Care' towards them. Risk assessments need to consider the level of maturity and not take for granted that it would be the same as an older volunteer. Employment Law requires individual risk assessments for young employees and although this is not required for volunteers it is advisable as it enables you to consider each volunteer's level of understanding and maturity. 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 can 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 and opportunities such as helping at youth clubs take place after 7pm.

For information: The Working Time Regulations (1998) implement the European Working Time Directive into GB law. The rights of young workers; those over the minimum school leaving age but under 18 years, and those under the minimum school age on approved work experience schemes differ in the following ways:

- A limit of eight hours working time a day and 40 hours a week (unless there are special circumstances);
- not to work either between 10pm and 6am or between 11pm and 7am (except in certain circumstances);
- 12 hours' rest between each working day;
- Two days' weekly rest and a 30-minute in-work rest break when working longer than four and a half hours.

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 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 is working 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 4.9 Safeguarding and good management practices or contact WCVAs Safeguarding Service, which provides information, advice, resources and training to third sector organisations via the Helpdesk number 0300 111 0124 or alternatively email safeguarding@wcva.org.uk. [A guide to safeguarding young volunteers on social media](#) sets out practical tips an organisation can take to ensure safe use of social media and the various platforms young people are likely to use.

Any volunteering activity that has substantial unsupervised access to vulnerable groups, including children, is not advised for volunteers under the age 18. However, if a young volunteer over the age of 16 is involved such activities you will need to consider if they should undergo other safer recruiting procedures such as Disclosure and Barring Services (DBS) checks. Further information on DBS provider checking services can be found on the WCVA website.

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 organisations 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 can provide their own consent.

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. For more information regarding volunteering can be accessed on the GOV.UK website. 2012 regulations). Information about this can be found on their website www.dwp.gov.uk/policy/welfare-reform/legislation-and-key-documents/welfare-reform-act-2012/welfare-reform-regulations/. The DWP has issued guidelines on some benefits (Appendix 5: Welfare Reform Act).

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?'

Perhaps the most important thing is to ask young people how they would like to be involved. Giving young people a say, shows you respect their opinions and want to listen to them. Getting them involve to co-produce to shape 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 develop innovative practice and delivery to benefit the people you support and the 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 or as an advisor to your board of trustees.

If you are keen to involve young volunteers, but at present only have volunteer roles, which are suitable for over 18s, 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 and with their peers or in the wider community.

Do you have trouble keeping up with all the ever-changing technology? Does the world-wide-web 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 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:

- Use your local volunteer centre. Your first stop should be Youth Volunteering Advisors (YVAs). There are 22 part-time YVAs in Wales. Their aims are 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 at www.wcva.org.uk/volunteering/youth-volunteering. Your YVA can promote your volunteering opportunities through a national database that can be accessed by anyone in Wales www.volunteering-wales.net.

Secondly, contact organisations that already engage young people. Schools, colleges, universities, youth clubs, Scout and Guide units, youth networks, job centres, youth offending services, social services and many more. 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. Do you know of education institutions which offer courses that are particularly relevant to your roles, where young people can gain practical experience of, say, the health sector or working with children?

Exhibitions and events such as fresher's fairs and careers events can be useful recruitment opportunities.

Consider your existing publicity. 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 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.

Ensuring young people understand the role and can commit

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's the right role for them?

You will need to take into consideration pressures of schoolwork, 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.

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?

First consider why they are volunteering. Is it to gain new skills? Make friends? Add to their CV? Give something back and feel they are making a difference?

Can you help fulfil these needs by offering training and the chance to develop their roles or create new ones? If the training is not accredited externally you could accredit it internally by setting several standards and outcomes for the young person to achieve.

Social events help young volunteers settle in, meet others and create a social network.

Offering references, where appropriate, shows that you are also committed to helping them further their career or education.

Volunteer management system

WCVA, together with the County Voluntary Councils (CVCs) have developed a new [volunteering digital platform](#) which enables volunteers across the age range, including young people to search for volunteering opportunities in their area, make prompt contact with prospective organisations, log their volunteering hours, receive digital achievement badges and download certificates. The platform is mobile friendly on smart devices.

Recognising young volunteer achievements

Recognising young volunteer's achievements is a great way to make them feel valued and celebrate their success. A new digital system to record the number of volunteering hours, irrespective of age, mark certain milestones (50, 100, 200, 500 and 1000 hours). In achieving those hours, digital achievement badges are awarded. Volunteers and the organisation(s) where they volunteer can download certificates of achievements. Young people need to [sign up](#) and can immediately begin to log their volunteering hours. As an organisation you need to ensure that it is registered on the system to enable volunteers to begin accounting for their hours.

E-Learning Module

Involving young people in volunteering and social action E-Learning Module is available to enrol on the [WCVAs Learning Zone](#). The session is for organisations who want to encourage and involve young people to volunteer. The Module, while focused on young people, is appropriate across the age range and sets out the best practice in volunteering.

Finally, don't forget to let young people know that you and any beneficiaries really 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, help them feel a part of the community and have a sense of responsibility for it. Showing appreciation can be as simple as saying thank you, giving a card or certificate, or as elaborate as throwing an awards ceremony to celebrate volunteers' contributions.

Further reading and resources

General information and advice regarding involving young volunteers

National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (NSPCC)

www.nspcc.org.uk

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

Agored Cymru (for accrediting courses)

www.ocnwales.org.uk

Youth Achievement Awards

www.youthcymru.org.uk/yaa/index.html

The Legal Guide To Involving Young People As Volunteers by Clair Bryan and Esther Thompson, Islington Volunteer Bureau, February 2000. Available from

www.amazon.co.uk

[Volunteers and the Law](#) by Mark Restall, Volunteering England, June 2005

[A Guide to Involving Young People in Voluntary Activity](#) by Mark Jones, SCVS and Swansea 14-19 network

NCVO – Volunteering England

www.volunteering.org.uk

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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