



CabinetOffice
Office of the **Third Sector**

A British Youth Council Report
'Recognise and Respect Us'
Overcoming Barriers to Youth Volunteering



INTRODUCTION

This report has been produced by the British Youth Council, as part of our wider programme of work as a strategic volunteering partner of the Office of the Third Sector.

The British Youth Council (BYC) is a youth led organisation for young people across the UK. BYC links up with our community of member organisations and network of local Youth Councils to empower young people to play a role in decision-making at a local, national and global level. Our vision is that all young people should be respected and able to influence and inform decisions which affect their lives or upon which they have strong opinions. BYC enables young people to boost their skills through participating in our training workshops and programmes, volunteering opportunities and campaigns.

The Government is keen to encourage more young people to get involved in volunteering to allow them to experience the benefits it brings to them and the positive contribution volunteers provide to society as a whole.

BYC conducted two pieces of research, the first was in 2006 and the second was in 2008, to collect data on the characteristics of volunteers, the different types of volunteering activities they took part in, how often they volunteer and the benefits young people gained from volunteering. In addition to this, both surveys sought to identify barriers to youth volunteering and how young people might overcome any barriers they face when volunteering. This report presents the findings of the 2008 survey along with BYC's recommendations on how to overcome barriers to volunteering.

METHODOLOGY

BYC's survey was undertaken in 2008, with a diverse group of 12-26 year olds from across the UK. 71% of the respondents were aged 12-19.

The survey used both qualitative and quantitative methods to gather data and obtain information, including online and paper based questionnaires, in-depth telephone interviews and focus groups.

The questionnaires were distributed to all BYC partner organisations, including national and local youth organisations and local youth councils, local volunteer bureaus, BYC volunteers, colleges and youth centres. The 2008 questionnaires were also distributed to all those that completed BYC's questionnaire in 2006.

Nearly 300 young people participated in the survey, 261 young people completed a questionnaire. A third of the questionnaire respondents were male, two-thirds were female. Two-thirds of the respondents were White British, the remaining third were from BME groups and nearly 10% of the all respondents had a disability.

In-depth interviews were conducted with over 30 young people from a cross section of society; ten young people were interviewed from a variety of different ethnic backgrounds; Pakistani, Chinese, Black African, and Indian and a series of phone interviews (six in total) were held with young volunteers with a disability.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The British Youth Council (BYC) is a youth led organisation for young people across the UK.

As part of BYC's work as a strategic volunteering partner of the Office of the Third Sector, we conducted a survey with young people in 2008, using both quantitative and qualitative research methods to look at overcoming barriers to volunteering for young people.

Questionnaires were distributed to all BYC partner organisations, including national and local youth organisations and local youth councils, local volunteer bureaus, BYC volunteers, colleges and youth centres. A series of in-depth interviews were also conducted to gain a greater picture of the experiences and perceptions of young people.

BYC works with a diverse range of young people and this was reflected in the responses gathered from nearly 300 young people aged 12-26. 71% of respondents were aged 12-19, a third of the respondents were from BME groups and 10% were disabled.

BYC's survey found the following:

The main barriers to volunteering are “cost”, “knowing what is available” and “time”

- The research identified a number of barriers to volunteering, but the most significant appear to be cost (associated with volunteering, such as travel), knowing what volunteering opportunities are available to them, and not having free time.

Young people want more remuneration and community recognition

- The research reveals that to help overcome barriers to volunteering, there needs to be a move towards better remuneration for volunteer expenses and more formal recognition of the time they put into volunteering.

Young people need more flexible opportunities and more information about them

- The research identifies the need for more flexible volunteering opportunities and better information, peer-marketing and promotion of the volunteering opportunities available.

Young people are regularly engaging in both *formal and informal* volunteering

- The majority of young people are engaging in both *formal* and *informal* volunteering activities. (Formal volunteering was defined as getting involved in community type projects or in the work of organisations compared to informal volunteering which can involve helping friends and relatives with chores like shopping or gardening). The majority of respondents are volunteering every week.

FINDINGS

1. Numbers of young people volunteering

BYC's survey found that the majority of the young people questioned were volunteering.

87% of our respondents claimed to have undertaken some form of volunteering activity; however more young women were volunteering than young men.

2. Structure of volunteering - formal and informal volunteering

Our survey found that more young people are choosing to volunteer across both *formal* and *informal* volunteering. *Formal volunteering was defined as getting involved in community type projects or in the work of organisations compared to informal volunteering which can involve helping out friends and relatives with chores like shopping or gardening.*

38% of respondents said they took part in both formal and informal volunteering, 28% of our respondents were engaged in formal volunteering such as campaigning, assisting with training and development programmes or fundraising for an organisation. 25% of our respondents were engaging in informal volunteering activities such as helping friends, family, relatives, neighbours and the community.

A smaller percentage were also found to be volunteering in other community based volunteering activities, 14% were volunteering in community centres, 13% in after school clubs and 10% were volunteering for professional bodies.

However, while the majority of the respondents are volunteering, only 57% of our respondents said that they volunteered on a weekly basis. 12% said they

volunteered every two weeks, 18% said they volunteered monthly and just over 9% volunteer at time convenient to them.

3. Significance of volunteering in the community

Interestingly, the findings from the survey reveal that over half of the young people either did not know or thought that their community did not appreciate their volunteering efforts.

Only 44% of respondents stated that they felt their community recognised their volunteering activities. Nearly 50% of respondents cited that they were uncertain about their community's response or they felt their contributions were not appreciated by their community.

The information gathered through the in-depth interviews emphasised the importance of raising the level of community involvement in volunteering.

4. Where do young people find out about volunteering opportunities?

Our research suggests that the young people are more likely to hear about volunteering opportunities from school and friends and family rather than through community centres.

32% of the respondents said they found out about volunteering from school, nearly 30% of respondents said that they also heard about volunteering opportunities through friends and family, with only 15% citing community centres.

Information gathered from the in-depth interviews also suggests that young people have family members and friends who have inspired them to volunteer.

5. Why do young people volunteer?

The questionnaires and the in-depth interviews indicated that the main reason young people became involved in volunteering is to make a contribution to society, to help others and gain a sense of personal satisfaction. As well as the altruistic reasons, many young people also said that they volunteer to develop their skills and to make new friends.

29% of respondents said they volunteered to make a difference and 25% cited gaining a sense of personal satisfaction. These findings were also illustrated through the in-depth interviews.

“It gives me the satisfaction of knowing that my view counts and that it is recognised by senior members of society and politicians. It also gives me opportunities to help people which I find very rewarding”. Male, age 17.

“I work in the community; there are lots of problems going on out there, so I think if everyone works together we can make a better community”. Male, age 17.

24% of respondents described their volunteering experience as a way to use the skills gained in paid employment, to refresh skills not currently being used and to develop new skills and abilities.

“I think as a young person you gain lots of skills, it builds confidence and prepares you for the world of work”. Male, age 19.

Furthermore, 20% of respondents in the questionnaire commented that volunteering was a “great way to meet people”, and to ‘develop a social network’.

6. Barriers to volunteering

Our findings from both the questionnaires and the in-depth interviews highlighted 'cost', 'knowing what's available' and 'lack of time' as the three most influencing barriers to volunteering for young people.

Nearly half, 48%, of all respondents ranked cost as the most significant barrier to volunteering, 47% said knowing what is available and 45% said lack of time.

The first main barrier was cited as 'cost', the focus groups were able to explore the issue of cost in more detail; young people commented that they were worried about the costs associated with volunteering for example having to pay for their own travel and accommodation.

"Firstly, I believe volunteering is quite expensive and to overcome it, the train tickets and everything should be subsidised". Female, age 16.

The second main barrier to participation was cited as 'knowing what's available'. The research showed that many problems arise from lack of access to the right information and there is also a lack of knowledge about the range of volunteer roles and activities that are available in local areas.

"I had to look really hard to find volunteering work, it wasn't as easy to find as it should be". Male, age 19.

'Lack of time' was cited as the third main barrier to volunteering. The in-depth interviews were also able to explore this further, many young people explained that work, family, personal commitments and the corresponding time pressures meant that there was no time to be a volunteer.

"Some people don't have much time to do it, like personally I go out to work and school and stuff like that". Female, age 15.

7. Overcoming barriers to volunteering

BYC's survey canvassed the attitudes of young people on how to overcome barriers to volunteering and how to encourage more young people to volunteer.

24% cited they think that barriers to volunteering could be removed by introducing a wider range of volunteering opportunities, 21% want official recognition and 17% want reimbursement for expenses.

Interestingly, our findings indicate that to overcome barriers to youth volunteering, there is an over-riding need to create a diverse range of volunteering opportunities for young people. Young people also argued for their volunteering expenses to be reimbursed and for the need to be given official recognition for their volunteering contributions, such as awards and certificates.

The findings from the questionnaires were also reinforced through the focus groups and in-depth interviews.

In fact, young people suggested that additional initiatives should be taken by voluntary organisations, schools, colleges and universities to ensure that young people of all ages and different backgrounds, can easily access volunteering information. In addition to this, young people cited peer marketing as a crucial technique in engaging young people in volunteering opportunities and they themselves recognised the need to promote volunteering among their friends at schools and colleges.

Young people also argued that steps should be taken by organisations to ensure the flexibility of volunteering roles. Including the possibility of tailored opportunities being offered to young people aged 12-16.

The young people also stressed that in order to attract young volunteers; organisations must also promote themselves as dynamic and attractive places to volunteer.

Recommendations

During the course of the research, many recommendations were made by the young people on how to engage more young people into volunteering and how to dismantle the barriers to volunteering. Strategies need to tackle not just the various subsets of the volunteering population (e.g. the young disabled people, and those from BME groups) but aim to overcome the different volunteering barriers young people face to volunteering.

Recognise and respect volunteers

- Volunteers need to be acknowledged, appreciated and respected for their contributions; the factors that contribute to the retention of volunteers include rewards and recognition. Recognition should occur frequently and consistently, in a variety of forms, such as **awards, certificates and ceremonies** to celebrate volunteer contributions, in addition, these young people should also receive local publicity for their contributions in their communities.

Flexibility and reimbursement of expenses

- Lack of time appears to be a strong barrier to volunteering, volunteering opportunities should aim to be **flexible** by offering a wide range of tasks and activities. Some young people in full-time education can only volunteer during their holidays. Volunteering projects should consider offering **fixed length opportunities**, to help give volunteers a sense of completion.
- Young people need to be reimbursed in some way; this could include **covering travel and food expenses**.

Develop more volunteering opportunities that are fun and relevant

- Volunteering for young people must be enjoyable. Young people want to get involved in activities that are not only fun but focus on issues relevant to them and their concerns. Projects centred on children's rights', youth issues, campaign work, and so on are particularly attractive. Young people often welcome challenging opportunities that allow them to develop.

Increased advertising/marketing

- Many young people still remain unaware of the opportunities for volunteering that are available to them, and the personal benefits arising from them. There is a need for more promotion of volunteering positions. A **nationwide advertising campaign** could help towards overcoming this barrier.
- The Internet should also be used more as an information and advertisement tool to enhance the breadth and expansion of volunteering. **Schools and other youth related agencies should allocate a space on their website** where organisations can advertise volunteer opportunities for young people.
- Many young people hear about volunteering opportunities through friends and family, a positive **peer marketing campaign** aimed at young people and families could help to engage their interest in volunteering.
- Opportunities must be widely **advertised** not just through mainstream channels but **through specialist groups**, such as those for the disabled, BME groups and faith groups.
- There should be more websites which have the functionality to match volunteers to projects meeting their skills, knowledge and interests.

- For cultures where social norms play a key role, promotional efforts should be aimed at the support networks – that is family, friends and ethnic groups – of potential volunteers. For these groups. Volunteering should be promoted through community leaders, making announcements at local centres, putting up posters on billboards and through the distribution of leaflets.

CONCLUSION

BYC's survey found that young people are now regularly engaging across both formal and informal volunteering activities. *Formal volunteering was defined as getting involved in community projects or in the work of organisations compared to informal volunteering which can involve helping out friends and relatives with chores like shopping or gardening.*

Young people's motives' for volunteering are based around altruism, helping others and serving the community; and are also focussed on self-development, skill development, social contact, and preparing for employment.

However a significant number of young people feel that their volunteering is not appreciated by their communities and want to see this addressed through raising awareness of their contributions.

Young people appear to be unaware that there are currently thousands of volunteering opportunities out there, and suggest that more is done by organisations and the government to promote and advertise these opportunities more widely to young people.

However, the research does reveal that more young people are finding out about existing opportunities through their schools and friends and family.

The research has shown that perceived barriers to volunteering for young people centre largely around cost, knowing what's available and lack of time.

The research respondents stressed that it is becoming increasingly important for organisations involving volunteers, to offer more flexible opportunities to young people so that they can fit volunteering around other commitments. Young people also need to be appropriately reimbursed for any expenses incurred, recognised and respected for their volunteering contributions.